

PERPETUAL CREATIVITY IN THE PERFECTION OF GOD: IBN TAYMIYYA'S HADITH COMMENTARY ON GOD'S CREATION OF THIS WORLD

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INTRODUCTION¹

The Islamic controversy over the creation of the world has received much scholarly attention, and the outlines of the debate up through Ibn Rushd (Averroes, d. 595/1198) are well known to students of Islamic philosophy.² On the one hand, the Kalām theologians argue from the temporal origination (*hudūth*) of accidents and the impossibility of an infinite regress that God temporally originated the world from nothing.³ On the other, the philosophers al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 428/1037) reason along Neoplatonic lines that the perfection of God as the cause of the world entails its eternity; otherwise God would be subject to change or prior imperfection upon

¹ I would like to thank Muammer İskenderoğlu and David Thomas for their assistance in the early stages of preparing this article, and Yahya Michot and an anonymous reader for reviewing the translation with great care and recommending numerous improvements. Parts of an early version of this introduction were presented as a paper at the annual conference of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies, Cambridge, 3–5 July 2000.

² For an extensive bibliography, see the entry ‘creation’ in Hans Daiber, *Bibliography of Islamic Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 1. 89–91. For additional bibliography and a recent review of the controversy, see Muammer İskenderoğlu, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Thomas Aquinas on the Question of the Eternity of the World* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 29–58, (7–29 give further background from Plato to early Christian theology). Herbert A. Davidson details the proofs set forth in the debate in *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

³ Arguments for the impossibility of an infinite regress are traceable to the sixth-century Christian philosopher John Philoponus. See Davidson, *Proofs*, 86–94 (on Philoponus) and 117–27 (Kalām proofs). For the proofs from accidents developed by the Kalām theologians, see *ibid.* 134–46.

creating the world in time.⁴ These philosophers also portray creation as an eternal emanation from God.

Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) sets out a refutation of the philosophers' arguments in his famous *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*.⁵ He notes, for example, that the philosophers in fact deny God as the Agent of the world because something eternal—in this case the world—cannot have an agent. He also maintains that it was in the nature of God's eternal will to choose when the world originated. In turn Ibn Rushd observes that both the philosophers and the Kalām theologians interpret Qur'ānic verses pertaining to creation metaphorically: the theologians in particular can find no verse indicating that God created the world from absolutely nothing. Ibn Rushd re-employs the Neoplatonic notion that the perfection of God as the cause of the world entails its eternity, but he drops the Avicennan emanation scheme. He characterizes creation as a perpetual process in which God originates creatures from pre-existing matter, which itself has been created by God from eternity.⁶

The crux of the debate to this point is apparent. Does God create the world eternally out of the perfection of His nature (philosophers), or out of nothing according to His free will (Kalām theologians)? Muammer İskenderoğlu's recent work on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 606/1209) *Al-Maṭālib al-‘āliyya*,⁷ which comes from late in the theologian's life, adds a new perspective to the controversy. Although al-Rāzī is unacquainted with his contemporary Ibn Rushd, he similarly notes that the Qur'ānic evidence on creation supports neither the Kalām theologians nor the philosophers. However, al-Rāzī does not maintain that God's perfection entails the world's eternity, and he regards the arguments set forth by both sides as indecisive. What al-Rāzī does appear to affirm is that the theories of the philosophers and the Kalām theologians offer two different ways of viewing the world's full dependence on God for its existence.⁸

⁴ Arguments for eternity from God's perfection go back to Proclus, the fifth century Neoplatonist. See ibid. 56–67 for such proofs in Proclus, Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Rushd, and others.

⁵ *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, Arabic text and English trans. by Michael E. Marmura (Provo, Ut.: Brigham Young University, 1997).

⁶ Oliver Leaman, *Averroes and his Philosophy*, rev. edn. (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1998), 15–81, gives an overview of Ibn Rushd's view of God and his refutation of al-Ghazālī. See also Zaynab Maḥmūd al-Khuḍayrī, *Athar b. Rushd fī falsafat al-‘uṣūr al-wusṭā* (Cairo: Maktabat al-anglū al-miṣriyya, 1995), 211–39, for an incisive discussion of Ibn Rushd on creation.

⁷ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-‘āliyya min al-‘ilm al-ilāhī*, ed. Ahmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā, 9 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-‘arabi, 1407/1987). The fourth volume treats creation.

⁸ İskenderoğlu, 121–4.

Almost completely unknown to Western-language scholarship in Islamic philosophy and theology is that the historical and intellectual horizon of this debate widens even beyond al-Rāzī in the thought of the Hanbali theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). Oliver Leaman comments that Ibn Rushd may have ‘had the last word’ but ‘in many ways Ghazālī had the last laugh’, because Ibn Rushd had practically no impact on Islamic thought following his death while al-Ghazālī has enjoyed great prominence down to the present.⁹ Henri Laoust, in his encyclopedic and still unsurpassed *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Takī-d-Dīn Alḥmad b. Taimīya* (1939), might lead us to believe that Ibn Taymiyya presents no exception to Leaman’s assessment. According to Laoust, Ibn Taymiyya provides no more than a ‘réédition’ of al-Ghazālī’s arguments against the philosophers.¹⁰ Yet in a footnote, Laoust intimates that Ibn Taymiyya’s thought on creation is more complex when he remarks that the traditionalist scholar comes close to ‘having admitted the co-eternity of matter to God’.¹¹

Two subsequent and little-noticed studies indicate that there is more truth in Laoust’s footnote than in his primary analysis. First is Husām Alousî’s 1965 Cambridge doctoral thesis, *The Problem of Creation in Islamic Thought*, which was later published in Baghdad.¹² This book gives brief attention to Ibn Taymiyya in several places. Alousî claims that, despite Ibn Taymiyya’s attempt to return to the Qur’ān and the views of the *salaf* (i.e. the early Muslims), his method is fundamentally philosophical. Ibn Taymiyya draws upon the Kalām tradition and the philosophers Ibn Sīnā and Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d. after 560/1164–5) to overcome the Kalām problem of a God who was inactive prior to His decision to create, while yet rejecting the eternity of the world.¹³ According to Alousî, Ibn Taymiyya sees God’s activity of creation as eternal and without beginning. However, this does not mean that any one object that God creates is eternal.¹⁴ Rather, ‘every particular created thing, such as our own world, has a beginning in time,

⁹ Leaman, 14; the demise of Ibn Rushd’s thought in the Islamic world is further discussed on pp. 176–7.

¹⁰ Henri Laoust, *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Takī-d-Dīn Alḥmad b. Taimīya, canoniste hanbalite né à Harran en 661/1262, mort à Damas en 728/1328* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l’institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1939), 174.

¹¹ Laoust, 173 n. 1.

¹² Husām Muḥī Eldīn al-Alousî, *The Problem of Creation in Islamic Thought: Qur’ān, Hadīth, Commentaries, and Kalām* (Baghdad: National Printing and Publishing Co., 1968).

¹³ Ibid. 85, 95–6, 184–5, 262.

¹⁴ Ibid. 56, 95.

but...the series of such objects of creation has no beginning in time'.¹⁵ The objects of God's creation form an infinite series that has no beginning or end.¹⁶

The second study is a 1985 article published in Arabic by 'Abd al-Majid al-Şaghîr comparing the Hanbali traditionalist with Ibn Rushd.¹⁷ Şaghîr's purpose is not to claim that Ibn Taymiyya borrowed directly from Ibn Rushd—although Şaghîr does not preclude this possibility—but to draw attention to the many affinities and similarities between the two. Şaghîr first notes that the two scholars uphold the congruity of reason and revelation and that they accuse Kalâm theology and Avicennan philosophy of violating both.¹⁸ Ibn Taymiyya's esteem for reason may come as unexpected in quarters where his polemics against the intellectual currents of his time have given him an antirationalist reputation. However, this reputation is unwarranted, and it will become clear in the course of this article that his polemics derive not from opposition to reason as such but from an alternative theological vision.¹⁹

On the matter of creation, Şaghîr observes that both Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Rushd hold to a kind of continuous creation from eternity and that both illustrate how the Qur'ân indicates that the heavens and the earth were created from preceding matter. Moreover, both thinkers say that there was nothing in the revealed sources to support the idea that originating events (*ḥawâdîth*) had a beginning. In this Şaghîr finds Ibn Taymiyya's argumentation quite similar to Ibn Rushd's *Fasl al-maqâl*.²⁰ Yet, he does note that for Ibn Rushd the Qur'anic verses

¹⁵ Ibid. 187.

¹⁶ Ibid. 113. Alousî also notes that Ibn Taymiyya's ideas lead 'to the view that God only precedes all his creatures in essence, and not in time' (p. 268). As we shall see, this is not correct since Ibn Taymiyya argues explicitly that God always precedes any one created thing in time.

¹⁷ 'Mawâqif rushdiyya li-Taqî al-Dîn Ibn Taymiyya? Mulâhâzât awwaliyya', in *Dirâsât magribiyya muhdât ilâ al-mufakkir al-maghrîbi Muhammâd 'Azîz al-Habbâbî* (Rabat: 1st edn. 1985), 93–117; (Rabat: 2nd edn. Al-Markaz al-thâqâfî al-'arabi, 1987), 164–82. References here are to the second edition.

¹⁸ Şaghîr, 166–7, 180–2.

¹⁹ For a strongly antirationalist portrayal of Ibn Taymiyya, see Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 2nd edn. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 312–8.

²⁰ *Kitâb faṣl al-maqâl* with its appendix (*Damîma*) and an extract from *Kitâb al-kashf 'an manâhij al-adilla*, ed. George F. Hourani (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), 19–21; English trans. by George F. Hourani, *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy: A translation, with introduction and notes, of Ibn Rushd's Kitâb faṣl al-maqâl, with its appendix (Damîma) and an extract from Kitâb al-kashf 'an manâhij al-adilla* (London: Luzac, 1961), 55–7.

on creation are open to interpretation (*ta'wil*) while for Ibn Taymiyya, they are decisive (*muhkam*) and have no need of *ta'wil*.²¹

Alousî's and Şaghîr's preliminary inquiries show that, contrary to Laoust, Ibn Taymiyya's views on the creation of the world are very different from those of al-Ghazâlî. They also reveal that his thought is definitely of interest for the history of the Islamic controversy over creation, especially as a continuation of patterns of thought found in Ibn Rushd. Perhaps Ibn Rushd's star did not fall quite as far in the Islamic tradition as Leaman supposes.

Ibn Taymiyya deals with creation in many of his works, giving lengthy discussions in his *Minhâj al-sunna*²² and *Dar' ta'âruq al-'aql wa-l-naql*.²³ The present article, however, is limited to introducing and translating a treatise employed by both Alousî and Şaghîr and probably dating to the latter years of Ibn Taymiyya's life: his *Sharh hâdîth 'Imrân b. Hûsayn* (hereafter *'Imrân*).²⁴ This translation is set forth as a first step toward the much more extensive investigation that

²¹ Şaghîr, 169–75. Şaghîr does not explain Ibn Taymiyya's approach to *ta'wil* fully. Unlike the Kalâm theologians, Ibn Taymiyya does not distinguish between divine attributes that require reinterpretation (*ta'wil*)—such as God's sitting on the Throne—and others that do not. Rather, he affirms that all of God's attributes are equally unlike anything in the created world, except for the name, and that their modalities (*kayfiyya*) are unknown. Thus, Ibn Taymiyya rejects the metaphorical reinterpretation of Kalâm theology because the very act of judging an attribute to require *ta'wil* involves first likening it to creatures. However, he accepts what he calls the *ta'wil* of the *salaf*, which is the interpretation (*tafsîr*) of the linguistic meaning of God's attributes and acts. It is at this level that Ibn Taymiyya works theologically. This is discussed further in chapter 1 of my Ph.D. thesis 'An Islamic Theodicy: Ibn Taymiyya on the Wise Purpose of God, Human Agency, and Problems of Evil and Justice' (University of Birmingham, UK, 2002), which I am preparing for publication.

²² *Minhâj al-sunna al-nabawiyya fî naqd Kalâm al-Shî'a al-Qadariyya* [hereafter *Minhâj*], ed. Muhammâd Râshîd Sâlim, 9 vols. (Riyadh: Jâmi'at al-Imâm Muhammâd b. Su'ûd al-islâmiyya, 1406/1986), 1. 141–446. This is equivalent to the older *Minhâj al-sunna al-nabawiyya fî naqd kalâm al-Shî'a wa-l-Qadariyya*, 4 parts (Cairo, 1321/1903–4; reprint, Beirut: Dâr al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, n.d.), 1. 34–124. Râshîd Sâlim has also produced an unfinished critical edition of *Minhâj* in two volumes (Cairo: Matba'at al-madâni, 1962), which were revised when republished later in the full nine-volume critical edition of 1406/1986. All references to *Minhâj* are to this later critical edition.

²³ *Dar' ta'âruq al-'aql wa-l-naql* [*Dar'*], ed. Muhammâd Râshîd Sâlim, 11 vols. (n.pl.: n.p., n.d.), *passim*; also published in part under the title *Bayân muwâfaqat şârib al-mâ'qûl li-şâhib al-manqûl* on the margins of the old four-part version of *Minhâj*.

²⁴ In *Majmû' fatâwâ Shaykh al-Islâm Aḥmad b. Taymiyya* (hereafter *MF*, but *F* in notes detailing textual variants), ed. 'Abd al-Râhîm b. Muhammâd b. Qâsim and Muhammâd b. 'Abd al-Râhîm b. Muhammâd, 37 vols. (Cairo: Dâr al-rahma, n.d.), 18. 210–43. (These page numbers have been inserted in the

Ibn Taymiyya's thought on God's creation of the world deserves. Following such an investigation, we will be in better position to evaluate both his contributions to the Islamic debate over creation and his relationship to predecessors such as Ibn Rushd.

Ibn Taymiyya's *'Imrān* is a commentary on a *ḥadīth* in the collection of *Bukhārī*, which focuses on the following portion of the text: 'God was, and there was nothing before Him, and His Throne was on the water. And He wrote everything in the Reminder. Then, He created the heavens and the earth'.²⁵ After introductory matters, Ibn Taymiyya cites two competing interpretations of the *hadīth*. According to the first, God's creative activity had a beginning in the past. However, the second limits the *hadīth*'s significance to a report that God's Throne was already in existence when God created this world as we know it. Ibn Taymiyya grounds the second interpretation in the authority of tradition by attributing it to 'the majority of the *salaf*' (p. 213), that is, to the early Muslim community, and by noting its conformity to the Qur'ān and the Hadith.

The remainder of the treatise is an extended proof for the second interpretation that rests on the strength of revelation (*shar'*) and tradition (*naql* and *sam'*) on the one hand and reason ('*aql*) on the other. With this, the *hadīth* commentary offers not only a window into Ibn Taymiyya's views on creation but also a sample of how his conviction that reason and tradition are congruent works in practice. The proof is given in fifteen aspects. I will refer to each aspect by the number assigned to it in the text. However, only fourteen aspects appear in fact because the ninth is missing. Possibly Ibn Taymiyya erred in his enumeration or a copyist made an omission.

Aspects 1 through 10 sift textual variants and explain that the first interpretation is not viable exegetically: the *ḥadīth* does not speak about the absolute beginning of creation; it indicates only that God created this world after the Throne. In the remaining five aspects, which comprise the latter two-thirds of the treatise, Ibn Taymiyya refutes

trans.). As for the dating of *'Imrān*, Ibn Taymiyya notes in the text that he had previously explained 'the congruity of clear reason with correct tradition (*muṭābaqat al-'aql al-ṣariḥ li-l-naql al-ṣahīḥ*)' (240). This is most likely a reference to *Bayān muwāfaqat ṣariḥ al-ma'qūl li-ṣahīḥ al-manqūl*, another name for *Dar'*. In the introduction to *Dar'* the editor Rashād Sālim does some careful investigative work to narrow the composition of this tome to between 713/1313 and 717/1318 (1. 7–10). Thus, Ibn Taymiyya probably composed *'Imrān* sometime after 713/1313.

²⁵ See the Translation and the accompanying notes for discussion of the *hadīth*'s sources and textual variants.

opposing viewpoints on the basis of tradition and a speculative theological stance that he believes is both rational and in accord with tradition.

In Aspects 11 and 12, Ibn Taymiyya attributes the interpretation of the *hadith* rejected in Aspects 1 through 10 to the Kalām theologians explicitly for the first time, and introduces a third position, that of the philosophers for whom the world is eternal. Moreover, he observes, the Kalām theologians, without resort to this *hadith*, are in the peculiar predicament of having absolutely no support for their doctrine in tradition.

While Aspects 11 and 12 indicate some of what Ibn Taymiyya finds irrational in the Kalām theologians and the philosophers, Aspect 13 provides the clearest expression of his theological viewpoint, as he gives Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's noncommittal attitude on the creation debate an uncharitable explanation. Ibn Taymiyya says that al-Rāzī and his ilk get confused when they see the errors in both the Kalām and philosophical positions but think that there are no alternatives because they are ignorant of the rational and tradition-based position.

Ibn Taymiyya explains that, when those who get bewildered look at the philosophers' view, they rightly see that reason, and its dynamic equivalent the natural constitution (*fitra*), require that agents precede their acts in time and that enacted, created things come into existence in time. Thus, they appropriately conclude, this world could not have been conjoined to God pre-eternally. Here, Ibn Taymiyya affirms the Kalām axiom that created objects originate in time after not existing, and he rejects Ibn Sīnā's notion that God the perfect cause precedes His effect the world in essence but not in time.²⁶ At the end of Aspect 13, Ibn Taymiyya also attacks Avicennan philosophy for stripping God of

²⁶ For Ibn Sīnā on causality, see Michael E. Marmura, 'Avicenna on Causal Priority', in *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, ed. Parviz Morewedge (Delmar, NY: Caravan, 1981), 65–83, and Michael E. Marmura, 'The Metaphysics of Efficient Causality in Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā)', in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani*, ed. Michael E. Marmura (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1984), 172–87 and 304–5. In *Minhāj* 1. 148–51 and 1. 218–9, Ibn Taymiyya argues that Ibn Sīnā's notion of God's essential causality leads necessarily to a static world. For if God were an eternal perfect cause immediately entailing its effect, then the effect would necessarily be eternal and it would be impossible for anything ever to originate. Thus, Ibn Taymiyya argues, the fact that we actually see things coming into existence in our world refutes Ibn Sīnā. The philosopher's derivation of origination in the sublunar world from the eternal circular movements of the celestial spheres does nothing to mitigate Ibn Taymiyya's conclusion: by definition, movement cannot arise from an eternal perfect cause.

His agency, which agency the Qur'ān affirms, because an eternal world cannot be the object of an agent. Al-Ghazālī, of course, had levelled the same criticism against the philosophers.

Going on in Aspect 13, Ibn Taymiyya notes that those who get confused turn next to the Kalām view that God's creative activity had a beginning. They correctly see that reason dictates that God could not have become an agent after not having been one unless a prior cause originated to necessitate the change. That is, it is impossible that God arbitrarily started creating at some point in the past after never having created before. Here, Ibn Taymiyya endorses the philosophers' axiom of efficient causality—every event requires a cause—and he rejects the Kalām view that it is in the nature of God's will to decide without prior cause.

Ibn Taymiyya explains further that al-Rāzī and his like fail in their attempt to synthesize the Kalām and philosophical views because they do not notice a distinction opening the door to a mediating position. That is, reason distinguishes God's perpetual activity and creativity from individual, concretized acts and created things, which come into existence in time after not existing. Thus, no one created thing is eternal, even though God has been creating one thing or another from eternity. In other words, the genus or species of created things has no beginning, but each created thing has had a beginning in time.

Following in the footsteps of Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd, Ibn Taymiyya then roots God's perpetual creativity in a Neoplatonic concept of God's perfection. Power and creativity are necessary concomitants of God's perfection. If God's creativity were not perpetual, God would have been devoid of His creativity, as well as other attributes of perfection, in pre-eternity. From this vantage point, Ibn Taymiyya not only charges the Kalām theologians with violating efficient causality by positing a beginning to God's creative work. He also censures them for stripping God of His attributes. For if there had been a beginning to God's creation, then God, prior to that, would not have been creative and must have lacked the power to create. Ibn Taymiyya complements this argument with the Qur'ānic verse, 'Is He who creates like one who does not create?' (Q. 16. 17).

In Aspects 14 and 15, Ibn Taymiyya repeats and elaborates various elements of his polemic and theological position found in Aspect 13. Aspect 14 explains that revelation informs us of the creation of the world in six days, God's perfection, and the creation of the world as we now know it from preceding matter and in preceding time. Aspect 15 affirms that God's perfection entails perpetual activity and further denounces the Kalām theologians and the philosophers for violating reason and tradition. Ibn Taymiyya closes the treatise by reminding

his readers that the Kalām position on creation has no basis in the views of God's Messengers.

What Ibn Taymiyya has done in *'Imrān* is argue that the evidence of the Qur'ān and the Hadith do not support, but rather oppose, the Kalām view of creation out of nothing in time and the Avicennan view of the eternity of the world. He also identifies rational difficulties in both the Kalām and Avicennan accounts of God's relation to the world, and, in place of these two views, he sets forth a God who is the perpetually dynamic Creator. God in His perfection has been acting and creating one thing or another from eternity by His will and power, while each concrete object that God originates has a beginning in time. Ibn Taymiyya maintains that this vision of God is rational, and he believes that it conforms to and is rooted in the tradition. The net effect of Ibn Taymiyya's work is to provide a speculative theological model for the God that he finds portrayed in the tradition, although he would likely add that this is what independent reason requires as well.

As noted earlier, Ibn Taymiyya's view of God's perpetual creativity is remarkably similar to that of Ibn Rushd. Although Ibn Taymiyya is aware of the philosopher and elsewhere even calls him 'the nearest of the philosophers to Islam',²⁷ he does not refer to Ibn Rushd in *'Imrān*. Why this might be and the exact relation between the two thinkers requires further research. However, we can safely conclude that in the history of the Islamic controversy over creation, Ibn Taymiyya's view of God's perfection in *'Imrān*, an eternally dynamic perfection that entails perpetual creativity, places him squarely in the camp of the philosophers rather than that of the Kalām theologians.

This does not, of course, make Ibn Taymiyya a philosopher, but it does remind us of Alousî's claim noted earlier that his method is philosophical. For Alousî this means that Ibn Taymiyya draws on Islamic philosophers to formulate his views despite his alleged adherence to the Qur'ān and the views of the *salaf*. It is apparent from this study, however, that Alousî does not adequately fathom the sense in which Ibn Taymiyya's work is philosophical. For Ibn Taymiyya, reason—rightly construed—does not oppose revelation, and in *'Imrān* he seeks to elucidate the rationality underlying the data on creation found in the Qur'ān and the Hadith. Thus, what we find in this treatise is a kind of philosophical theology, or, in different words, a philosophical interpretation and defence of tradition.²⁸

²⁷ MF 17. 295; Ṣaghīr 182.

²⁸ Shahab Ahmed, 'Ibn Taymiyyah and the Satanic verses', *Studia Islamica* 87 (1998), 67–124, identifies essentially the same methodology at work

The organic and associative character of Ibn Taymiyya's thought in *'Imrān* leads him to touch on many matters that are tangential to his main argument. Glossing these fully would greatly lengthen this article, and, in some cases, would require substantial new research into Ibn Taymiyya's theology. For these reasons, explanatory notes to the translation have been kept to a minimum. However, I will elaborate here on one subsidiary issue—God's speech—because it recurs several times in the treatise²⁹ and corroborates the perpetually dynamic vision of God already noted in Ibn Taymiyya's theology of creation. In *'Imrān*, Ibn Taymiyya never pulls his ideas on God's speech together into a comprehensive presentation. Thus, the following discussion also draws from fuller accounts found elsewhere in his writings.³⁰

The position that Ibn Taymiyya consistently upholds as rational and attributes to the *salaf*, as well as to Ahmad b. Hanbal, is that God in His perfection has been speaking from eternity by His will and power when He wills and that God's speech subsists in His essence. The genus of God's speaking is eternal. However, what God says, that is, His concretized speech, is not eternal. Thus, the Qur'ān is not eternal, but neither is it, as something subsisting in God's essence, created (*makhlūq*). To Ibn Taymiyya, the term 'created' implies something distinct and disjoined from God, and this, he explains, is why the *salaf* said that the Qur'ān was not created (*ghayr makhlūq*).³¹

in Ibn Taymiyya's scattered writings on prophetic *iṣma*. Ahmed puts it this way: Ibn Taymiyya attributes a particular view to the *salaf* and then goes beyond the *salaf* to give 'the rationale behind what they said, even if they did not say so themselves' (p. 112).

²⁹ At two points, *'Imrān* digresses into a typology of Kalām views on God's speech (211–2, 222–3), and a third mention of the issue discusses the philosophers as well (233–4, cf. 229–30). God's speech is also mentioned in passing elsewhere in the treatise.

³⁰ MF 12. 19–36, 42–53, 162–74, 526–31; MF 17. 165–7, 278; *Minhāj* 2. 358–90; *Minhāj* 3. 222–6; *Minhāj* 5. 416–29; and *Kitāb al-nubuwāt* (Beirut: Dār al-qalam, n.d.), 201–2, a French trans. of which is found in Jean R. Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya: Lettre à Abū l-Fidā'* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste de l'Université Catholique de Louvain, 1994), 32–6. For further references, see Laoust, 169–72, and the index in MF 36. 217–30. For a thorough discussion of the different theological views of God's speech in the Islamic tradition, see L. Gardet, 'Kalām', *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, new edn. [hereafter *EI*]² (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960–), 4. 468–71. Also of use for the Mu'tazilī and Ash'arī views is J. Bowman, 'The Doctrine of 'Abd al-Djabbār on the Qur'ān as the Created Word of Allah', in *Verbum: Essays on Some Aspects of the Religious Function of Words* (Utrecht: Drukkerij en Uitgeverij V/H Kemink en Zoon, 1964), 67–86.

³¹ See esp. MF 12. 52–5, 528–30. At MF 12. 66, Ibn Taymiyya explains why attributes given to God are uncreated, 'The attribute follows the object of attribution. If the object of attribution is the Creator, His attributes

In a study of the early Islamic controversy over the Qur'ān, Wilferd Madelung supports Ibn Taymiyya's contention that the *salaf*, that is, the early traditionalists, viewed the Qur'ān as uncreated but not eternal. However, Madelung argues that Ibn Taymiyya is wrong to maintain that Ibn Hanbal thought likewise. Rather, Ibn Hanbal defended the eternity of the Qur'ān and was instrumental in making this a widely held Sunnī doctrine.³²

Be that as it may, the reason Ibn Taymiyya freely associates God's speech with God's creation in *'Imrān* is now apparent: perpetual dynamism characterizes both attributes. In God's perfection, God has been both creating and speaking from eternity even though individual acts of creation and speech are not eternal.

As in the case of God's creation, Ibn Taymiyya censures other Islamic views of God's speech on the basis of his theology of God's perpetual dynamism. In *'Imrān* he criticizes the Jahmī³³ and Mu'tazilī Kalām theologians for positing a beginning to God's speech, making speech impossible for God before that, and thereby stripping God of His perfection in pre-eternity. These objections are identical to those Ibn Taymiyya raises against the Kalām view of the world's origin.

Ibn Taymiyya also accuses the Jahmīs/Mu'tazilis of protecting God's unity by locating God's created speech in a substrate apart from Himself. Ibn Taymiyya reasons that one whose speech subsists in another is not truly speaking at all. Rather, the other is speaking. To show the undesirable end to which this leads, he cites God's call to Moses, 'When he reached it, he was called from the right side of the valley in the blessed place from the tree, "O Moses! Truly, I am God, Lord of the worlds"' (Q. 28. 30). Now, Ibn Taymiyya argues, if God did not Himself give the call but created the call

are uncreated. If the object of attribution is the created servant, His attributes are created'. He continues that the Qur'ān in itself is uncreated, while the sounds of humans reciting it are created.

³² 'The Origins of the Controversy Concerning the Creation of the Koran', in J. M. Barral (ed.), *Orientalia Hispanica sive studia F. M. Pareja octogenario dicata*, vol. i/1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 504–25, reprinted as Part V in Wilferd Madelung, *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985).

³³ 'Jahmī' was a pejorative term used especially by early Hanbalīs to refer to certain Hanafis and Mu'tazilis who said the Qur'ān was created. The eponym of the Jahmīs was Jahm b. Safwān (d. 128/746). See W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), 143–8.

in the tree, then the tree was speaking. The tree, as the substrate in which the speech was created, was saying, ‘Truly, I am God’.³⁴

A second major Kalām position holds that God’s speech is eternal, subsists in His essence, and is necessarily concomitant to it. However, the eternity of God’s speech precludes God’s speaking by His will and power. Ibn Taymiyya rejects this position on the grounds that a God who does not speak by His will and power lacks perfection. Moreover, he asserts, eternal speech cannot be linked to specific events in time. For example, God’s call to Moses was not pre-eternal; it occurred at the time of the call itself.

Ibn Taymiyya divides this Kalām view into two sub-positions very concisely in *‘Imrān* (212 and 223); elsewhere he provides fuller treatments. In the first view, Ibn Kullāb (d. c.241/855), al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/936) and their followers maintain that God’s speech is one eternal meaning with diverse manifestations. Ibn Taymiyya rejects this for inadequately distinguishing the sundry things God says. He notes, for example, that ‘Say, “He is God, One”’ (Q. 112. 1) does not mean the same as ‘Perish the two hands of Abū Lahab’ (Q. 111. 1) and that the Qur’ān includes things not found in the Torah. The second sub-position is that of Ibn Sālim and the Sālimīs³⁵ who say that the individual letters and sounds of the Qur’ān are eternal. Ibn Taymiyya rejects the frequent attribution of this view to the *salaf* and Ibn Hanbal, and he asserts that belief in the eternity of God’s speech in general is an innovation.³⁶

Additionally, Ibn Taymiyya sometimes includes the Karrāmīs and the philosophers in his typologies of error in God’s speech. The Karrāmīs are close to Ibn Taymiyya’s position in that they maintain that God speaks by His will and power with successive letters and sounds subsisting in His essence. However, they differ by positing a beginning to God’s speaking, as do the Mu’tazilīs.³⁷

In *‘Imrān*, Ibn Taymiyya explains that for the philosophers God’s speech ‘is nothing other than the intelligible [forms] that originate in souls’ and that ‘speaking refers merely to the knowledge of the one spoken to’ (p. 234). Elsewhere, he complains that the philosophers understand God’s speaking to Moses to have originated within Moses

³⁴ ‘*Imrān*, 234, mentions this problem very briefly. For detail see *Minhāj* 5. 423–4.

³⁵ L. Massignon and B. Radtke, ‘Sālimīya’, *EI*² 8. 993–4, note that both Muḥammad b. Ahmad b. Sālim (d. 297/909) and his son Ahmad (d. 356/967) were important figures in the founding of the Sālimīs, a Sufi movement in Basra.

³⁶ See esp. *Minhāj* 5. 417–21.

³⁷ See esp. *MF* 12. 172–3 and *MF* 17. 165–6.

himself; Moses did not hear words from outside himself.³⁸ Ibn Taymiyya regards God's speech as personal communication from God to His Messengers, and this leads him to reject its philosophical explanation as prophetic intellection.

This survey on God's speech illustrates that Ibn Taymiyya's view of God's perfection entails not only God's perpetual dynamism but also His personal character: God speaks by His will to other beings. In sum, the theological vision that we find in *'Imrān* and Ibn Taymiyya's other writings used for this study is of a God who is personal and perpetually active, and this theology is the foundation for his extensive polemic against other theological currents in the Islamic tradition.

The translation of *'Imrān* is based on the text printed by 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim and Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad in *Majmū' fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad b. Taymiyya* [MF, but F in notes to the Translation detailing textual variants], (Cairo: Dār al-rahīma, n.d.), 18. 210–43, the pagination of which has been inserted into the translation. This text closely follows that edited by Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Majmū'at al-rasā'il wa-l-masā'il* [hereafter M], (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-manār, 1341–1349/1922–1930), 5. 172–95, at times adopting the emendations suggested by Riḍā in notes [hereafter R]. Textual variants and emendations, whether my own or those of Riḍā, are given in notes to the Translation. Riḍā tells us that he edited the text in M from the thirty-first part of *Kitāb al-kawākib al-darārī* in the Zāhiriyah library in Damascus.³⁹ In the translation I have realigned the paragraphing of MF somewhat to provide a more suitable division of the text. Also, I have added summary headings as a guide through the treatise.

Renderings of the Qur'ān and the Hadith are my own, although in the case of the Qur'ān I have benefited from reference to Arberry⁴⁰ and Hilālī/Khān.⁴¹ Qur'ān references are cited in the text with 'Q.' followed by the sura and verse number. Hadith references are given in the notes with the name of the collector (Bukhārī, Muslim, etc.), the *ḥadīth* number according to the *tarqīm al-'alāmiyya* system used on the CD-ROM *Mawsū'at al-ḥadīth al-sharīf*, Version 2.0 (Cairo: Sakhr, 1997), and the 'Kitāb' and 'Bāb' location of the *ḥadīth*. This should be adequate to locate each *ḥadīth* in any of the numerous printed

³⁸ MF 12. 42.

³⁹ M 5. 171.

⁴⁰ Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).

⁴¹ Muḥammad Taqī-ud-Dīn al-Hilālī and Muḥammad Muhsin Khān, *Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'ān in the English Language*, 4th edn. (Riyadh: Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, 1994).

editions of the standard collections. References to English translations of *ḥadīth* in Bukhārī and Muslim have also been provided.

TRANSLATION

[INTRODUCTION TO THE HADITH OF 'IMRĀN B. AL-HUŞAYN]

[210] In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Praise be to God. We ask Him for help. We ask Him for forgiveness. We take refuge in God from the evils of our selves and the evils of our deeds. Whomever God guides has no one to lead him astray. Whomever He leads astray has no guide. We testify that there is no god but God alone; He has no associate. We testify that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger—God bless him and give him great peace.

Section (*fāṣl*). In the *Sahīḥ* of Bukhārī and elsewhere among the *ḥadīth* of 'Imrān b. Huşayn—God be pleased with him—is that the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—said,⁴²

'O People of Tamīm! Accept the glad tidings!' They said, 'You have proclaimed glad tidings to us. Now give us [something]!' He turned to the People of Yemen and said, 'O People of [211] Yemen! Accept the glad tidings since the People of Tamīm did not accept them!' They said, 'We have accepted [them], O Messenger of God'. They said, 'We have come to you in order to gain understanding of religion and to ask you about the beginning (*awwal*) of this matter (*amr*)'. He said, 'God was, and there was nothing before Him (*qablahu*')—and in one wording, 'with Him (*ma'ahu*)', and in another wording, 'other than Him (*ghayruhu*)'⁴³—'And His Throne was on the water. And He wrote

⁴² The exact wording of this *ḥadīth* as Ibn Taymiyya relates it does not appear in the standard collections, but his text is close to that found in Bukhārī 2953, 'Bad' al-khalq, Mā jā'a fī qawl Allāh ta'āla wa-huwa alladhi yabda' al-khalq...' and the slightly different version in Bukhārī 6868, Al-Tawhīd, Wa-kāna 'arshuhu 'alā al-mā'.... English trans. of these two versions are found in Muhammad Muhsin Khān (trans.), *Sahīḥ Al-Bukhārī: Arabic–English* (Madina: Dār al-fikr, n.d.), 4. 278 (no. 414) and 9. 380–1 (no. 514), respectively. A somewhat different wording of the *ḥadīth* appears in Ahmad 19030, 'Awwal musnad al-Baṣriyyīn, Hadith 'Imrān b. Ḥusayn.' Alousī, 49–56, discusses the interpretation of this *ḥadīth*, and he casts doubt on its authenticity due to its textual variation and exaltation of Yemenī piety.

⁴³ Bukhārī 6868 reads *qablahu*; Bukhārī 2953 reads *ghayruhu*. The variant *ma'ahu* is not found in the standard Hadith collections. Later in 'Imrān, 216, Ibn Taymiyya erroneously says that all three variants are found in Bukhārī. In another text, he indicates that *ma'ahu* is not in Bukhārī, but he does not give

everything in the Reminder (*al-dhikr*). And (*wa*) He created the heavens and the earth—and in another wording, ‘Then (*thumma*), He created the heavens and the earth’.⁴⁴—Then a man came to me [‘Imrān b. Husayn] and said, ‘Catch your camel!’ for it had gone away. [So, I started off];⁴⁵ suddenly, the mirage cut in this side of it. ‘By God, I wish I had left it and not got up.’

His statement, ‘He wrote everything in the Reminder’ refers to the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawh al-mahfūz*), as when [God] said, ‘Indeed, we have written in the Psalms, after the Reminder’ (Q. 21. 105), that is, after the Preserved Tablet. What is written in the Reminder is called a reminder just as that in which [something] is written is called a book, as in His statement—He is mighty and great—‘This is indeed a noble Qur’ān in a hidden book’ (Q. 56. 77–8).

[TWO COMPETING INTERPRETATIONS OF THE HADITH:

(I) GOD'S ACTIVITY HAD A BEGINNING, AND

(II) GOD CREATED THIS WORLD AFTER THE THRONE]

People are of two views concerning this *hadīth*. [I] Some of them have said that what the *hadīth* intends to inform about is that God was existent alone and then He started originating all originating events (*hawādīth*), as well as to inform about [the following]: that the genus (*jins*) of originating events has a start (*ibtidā'*) and that their concrete entities (*a'yān*) are preceded by nonexistence (*adam*); that the genus of time (*zamān*) has originated outside time and the genus of movements and moved things has originated [in time]; and that God became

the alternative source (MF 6. 551). Alousī, 51, notes that *ma'abu* appears only in later writers such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. Examples from al-Rāzī are found in *Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr li-l-Imām al-Fakhr al-Rāzī* (Cairo: Mu'assasat al-maṭbū'āt al-islāmiyya, n.d.), 17. 188 (comment on Q. 11. 7), and in his *Asās al-taqdīs*, ed. Ahmad Hijāzī al-Saqqā (Cairo: Maktabat al-kulliyāt al-azhariyya, n.d.), 213. According to William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-'Arabi's Cosmology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 435, Ibn 'Arabi ‘invariably’ reads ‘with Him’ (*ma'abu*) when quoting the *hadīth*. Al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) cites the *hadīth* likewise in *Kitāb nihāyatū 'l-iqdām fī 'ilmī 'l-kalām*, ed. with English summary Alfred Guillaume (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 5, 10, and 19 (Arabic text). Ibn Taymiyya’s discussions of the key textual variants have been collected together by ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Faryawāī, *Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya wa-juhūdhu fī al-hadīth wa-'ulūmihī*, Riyadh: Dar al-‘Āsimah, 1416/1996), 2. 13–22.

⁴⁴ Bukhārī 2953 reads *wa*; Bukhārī 6868 reads *thumma*.

⁴⁵ ‘So, I started off’ is found in both versions of the *hadīth* in Bukhārī but not in Ibn Taymiyya’s text.

an agent after not having done anything from pre-eternity (*min al-azal*)⁴⁶ until the time at which He started to act, acting not having been possible [before].

Then these are of two views. [Ia] Some of them say that in the same way **He began to speak after [212] not having said anything.** Speech (*kalām*) **was not even possible** for Him. [Ib] Others say that speech is something by which He is qualified in a way that He is able to do it, [but] not that He speaks by His will and His power. Rather, [speech] is something **necessary** with His essence, apart from His power and His will.

[Ib1] Then some of these say that [His speech] is the meaning, apart from the recited words, and He expressed it by each of [the following]: the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms, and the Furqān. [Ib2] Others say that, on the contrary, it is letters and sounds, which are necessary with His essence from eternity to eternity, all the words of the Books that He sent down, and other than that.⁴⁷

[II] The second view concerning the meaning of the *hadīth* is that this was not the Messenger's intent. Rather, the *hadīth* contradicts this. His intent was to inform about the creation of this visible world that God created in six days, after which He sat on the Throne, just as the great Qur'ān informs about this in more than one place.⁴⁸ He—Exalted is He—[also] said, 'He it is who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and His Throne was on the water' (Q. 11. 7).

It has been established in the *Sahīh* of Muslim, from 'Abd Allāh b. 'Amr [b. al-'Āṣ], from the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—that he said, 'God determined the determinations of created things **fifty thousand years before He created the heavens and the earth**, and His Throne was on the water'.⁴⁹ [The Prophet]—God bless him and give him peace—informed of the determination [fifty thousand years earlier] of the creation of this created world in six days, and that at that time His Throne was on the water. So too, the Qur'ān and the previous

⁴⁶ To distinguish the various Arabic words often rendered 'eternity' in English, the following trans. conventions are used: *qidam* (eternity), *qadīm* (eternal), *abad* (post-eternity), *abādān* (post-eternally), *azal* (pre-eternity), *azālī* (pre- eternal), *azālān* (pre-eternally), and, usually, *lam yazal* (has been/had been/was... from eternity). Literally, *lam yazal* means 'had not ceased...'. However, this trans. often yields a sentence with a double negative, which is unwieldy in English.

⁴⁷ See the explanation of Ibn Taymiyya's views on God's speech in the Introduction.

⁴⁸ Among such Qur'ānic texts are 7. 54, 10. 3, and 25. 59.

⁴⁹ Muslim, 4797, Al-Qadar, Hijāj Ādām wa-Mūsā, in English, 'Abdul Hamīd Siddiqī, trans., *Sahīh Muslim* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, n.d.), 4. 1396–7 (6416).

ḥadīth that Bukhārī transmitted in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* from ‘Imrān—God be pleased with him—have informed about this.

[213] Pertaining to this is the *ḥadīth* that Abū Dā’ūd, Tirmidhī, and others have transmitted from ‘Ubāda b. al-Ṣāmit, from the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—that he said, ‘The first thing God created was the Pen. He said to it, “Write!” It said, “What shall I write?” He said, “What will be until the Day of the Resurrection”.⁵⁰ He created this Pen when He commanded it the written determination fifty thousand years before the creation of the heavens and the earth. It was created before the creation of the heavens and the earth; it was the first thing created of **this world**; and its creation was after the Throne, as the texts indicate. This is the view of the majority of the *salaf* [i.e. the early Muslims]. I have mentioned the views of the *salaf* in another place.⁵¹ The point here is to clarify what the texts of the Book and the Sunna indicate.

[PROOF FOR THE SECOND INTERPRETATION:
GOD CREATED THIS WORLD AFTER THE THRONE]

[Aspects 1–2 of the proof: In the hadīth the Prophet is asked about the beginning of the creation of this world, not about the beginning of creation absolutely]

There are several aspects to the proof of this second view. One of them concerns the statement of the People of Yemen, ‘We have come to you in order to ask you about the beginning of **this matter**.’ Either the ‘matter’ referred to is **this world or [it is] the genus of created things**. If the first was intended, the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—answered them, because he informed them about the beginning of the creation of this world. If the second was intended, he did not answer them, because he did not mention the beginning of creation absolutely. Rather, he said, ‘God **was**, and there was nothing before Him. And His Throne was on the water. And **He wrote everything in the Reminder**. Then, He created the heavens and the earth.’ He mentioned only the creation of the heavens and the earth. [214] He did not mention the creation of the Throne even though the Throne is a created thing also. Indeed, He says, ‘**He is the Lord of the Great Throne**’ (Q. 9. 129). He is Creator of everything, the Throne and everything else, and [He is] Lord of everything, the Throne and everything else. In the *ḥadīth* of Abū Rāzīn [Laqīt b. Ṣabira], the Prophet—God

⁵⁰ Abū Dā’ūd 4078, Al-Sunna, *Fi al-qadar*; Tirmidhī 2081, Al-Qadar ‘an Rasūl Allāh, Mā jā’ a fi al-ridā bi-l-qadā’.

⁵¹ I could not ascertain the work to which Ibn Taymiyya might be referring.

bless him and give him peace—informed about the creation of the Throne.⁵² In the *ḥadīth* of ‘Imrān, however, he did not inform about Its creation. Instead, he informed about the creation of the heavens and the earth. So, it is known that he informed about the beginning of the creation of this world, not about the beginning of creation absolutely.

Since he answered [the People of Yemen] concerning only this, it is known that they asked him only about this. They did not ask him about the beginning of creation absolutely. Indeed, it would not have been permissible for him to have answered them concerning what they had not asked him about and not to have answered them concerning what they did ask about. On the contrary, he—God bless him and give him peace—is exonerated of that. Additionally, his wording indicates only this; it does not indicate that he mentioned the beginning of creation. By his informing about the creation of the heavens and the earth after His Throne was on the water, he intended to inform [them] about the sequence of some created things after others. Now, they did not ask him about the mere sequence; they asked him only about the beginning of this matter. He knew that they had asked him about the starting point of the creation of this world, and he informed them about that.

Similarly, it has been said at the beginning of [the Torah]:⁵³ ‘In the beginning of the matter (*fī awwal al-amr*), God created the heavens and the earth’. Some [scholars]⁵⁴ interpret it, ‘In the beginning (*bad’*)’ or ‘At the start (*ibtidā’*), God created the heavens and the earth’. The point is that in [the Torah] there is information about the start of the creation of the heavens and the earth and that the water was covering over the earth and the wind was blowing over the water (Genesis 1. 1–2). He informed that [215] at that time this was water, air, and dust, and He informed in the great Qur’ān that ‘He created the heavens and the earth in six days, and His Throne was on the water’ (Q. 11. 7). In another

⁵² This *ḥadīth* is found in Tirmidhī 3034, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān ‘an Rasūl Allāh, Wa-min Sūrat al-Hūd*. It reads, ‘I [i.e. Abū Rāzīn] said, “O Messenger of God! Where was our Lord when He created His creation?” He said, “He was in clouds (*‘amā’*). There was no air under Him, and there was no air over Him. And He created His Throne on the water”.

⁵³ The Arabic reads *kamā nutiqa fī awwalihā*, with no antecedent for the feminine pronoun in the immediately preceding text. From what follows, however, it is evident that Ibn Taymiyya is discussing the opening lines of Genesis; Ibn Taymiyya gives a similar discussion in *Minhāj* 1. 363, in which he refers to the Torah explicitly.

⁵⁴ No antecedent for the plural pronoun in *ba’duhum* is apparent in the preceding text. Given the context, Ibn Taymiyya is probably referring to Jewish and Christian scholars. The lack of antecedent mention of both the Torah and ‘scholars’ may indicate that some text has been lost in copy transmission.

verse, ‘He rose over the heaven when it was smoke, and He said to it and to the earth, “Come willingly or unwillingly”. They both said, “We come, willingly”’ (Q. 41. 11). And from the *salaf* have come traditions (*āthār*) to the effect that the heaven was created from water vapour, which is the smoke.

The point here is that the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—answered [the People of Yemen] concerning what they had asked him about. He mentioned only the start of the creation of the heavens and the earth. [This] indicates that their intention in their statement, ‘We have come to you in order to ask you about the beginning of this matter’, was the creation of this world. God knows better.

The second aspect is that their statement, ‘this matter (*amr*)’, refers to a present existent. *Amr* may have the sense of a gerund (*maṣdar*). Or it may have the sense of a direct object (*mafūl bīhi*), that is, the thing commanded that God made by His command. The latter is what they meant. That which is His saying, ‘Be!⁵⁵’ is not something visible and referred to. Rather, the visible thing referred to is this thing commanded. He—Exalted is He—said, ‘And God’s command (*amr Allāh*) is a determination determined’ (Q. 33. 38). He—Exalted is He—[also] said, ‘God’s command will come’ (Q. 16. 1), and the likes of it are numerous.

If they had asked him about the beginning of creation absolutely, they would not have referred to it with this. Indeed, they had not seen that, and so they were not referring to it with this. Moreover, they did not even know about that. For that is only known through the information from Prophets. The Messenger—God bless him and give him peace—did not inform them about that. If he had [already] informed them about it, they would not have asked him about it. Thus, it is known that their question [216] was about the beginning of this visible world.

[Aspect 3: The established reading is, ‘God was, and there was nothing before Him’]

The third aspect is that he said, ‘God was, and there was nothing before Him’. It has also been transmitted, ‘with Him’, and it has been transmitted ‘other than Him’. The three wordings are in *Bukhārī*.⁵⁶ There was only one meeting, and their questioning and his answering [took place] during that meeting. Imrān, who transmitted this *hadith*, did not get up from the meeting when it was over. No, he got up when he was informed of the departure of his camel before the end of the meeting.

⁵⁵ *kun* FR: — M

⁵⁶ As mentioned in n. 43 above detailing the variants, only ‘before Him’ and ‘other than Him’ are found in *Bukhārī*.

He is the one informing of the words of the Messenger. [This] indicates that [the Prophet] said only one of the wordings. The other two have been transmitted as the sense. This being so, what has been established as being from him is the wording ‘before’. Indeed, it has been established in the *Sahīḥ* of Muslim, from Abū Hurayra, from the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—that he used to say in his invocation, ‘**You are the First, and there is nothing before You (qablaka). You are the Last, and there is nothing after You. You are the Outer, and there is nothing beyond You. You are the Inner, and there is nothing beneath You.**⁵⁷’ This agrees with and interprets His statement—Exalted is He—‘He is the First and the Last, the Outer and the Inner’ (Q. 57. 3).

As the wording ‘before’⁵⁸ is established in this *ḥadīth*, it has been established that the Messenger—God bless him and give him peace—said it, whereas neither⁵⁹ of the other two wordings has ever been established. Most Hadith scholars transmit it only with the wording ‘before’—‘God was, and there was nothing before Him’—such as al-Humaydī, al-Baghawī, Ibn al-Athīr, and others.⁶⁰ If he had said only, ‘God was, and there was nothing before Him’, there would be no opposition in this wording to the start of originating events or to the first created thing.

[Aspect 4: *The occurrences of ‘and’ in the ḥadīth do not indicate the first thing created*]

[217] The fourth aspect is that he said in it, ‘God was. And there was nothing before Him’—or ‘with Him’, or ‘other than Him’—‘And His Throne was on the water. And He wrote everything in the Reminder.’ He informed about these three [facts] with the word ‘and’ (*waw*). He did not mention ‘then’ (*thumma*) in any of these. ‘Then’ occurs only in his statement, ‘[Then], He created the heavens and the earth’, and concerning this, some transmitters have mentioned ‘He created the heavens and the earth’ with ‘then’, and some of them have mentioned

⁵⁷ Muslim 4888, ‘Al-Dhikr wa-l-du‘ā wa-l-tawba wa-l-istighfār, Mā yaqūlu ‘ind al-nawm wa-akhdh al-madja‘ ... / Siddīqī, trans., *Sahīḥ Muslim*, 4. 1422–3 (6551).

⁵⁸ [*al-qabl*] FM, the brackets probably indicate an emendation to the MS.

⁵⁹ *lam* FM: *lā* R, who maintains that this is grammatically more correct.

⁶⁰ ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr al-Humaydī (d. 219/834), Abū Muhammad al-Husayn b. Mas‘ūd b. Muhammad al-Farrā‘ al-Baghawī (516/1122), and Majd al-Dīn Abū al-Sā‘adat al-Mubārak b. al-Athīr (d. 606/1210) were prominent traditionalists. For the reference of the latter, the brother of the famed historian ‘Izz al-Dīn Abū al-Hasan ‘Alī b. al-Athīr (d. 630/1233), see his *Jāmi‘ al-uṣūl min aḥādīth al-Rasūl* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-sunna al-muḥammadiyya, 1368–74/1949–55), 4. 420.

it with ‘and’. As for the preceding three sentences, the transmitters are agreed that he mentioned them with the word ‘and’.

It is known that the word ‘and’ does not convey the sense of sequence (*tartib*), according to what is correct, to which the great majority adhere. It does not convey the sense of informing that one part of this precedes another. Even if it is presumed that sequence was intended—either from the sequence of mention, inasmuch as he has made one part of [the sentence] precede another, or from [taking] the ‘and’ [as sequential]⁶¹ according to whomever says so—what is therein is only to make His being (*kawnihī*) precede the Throne being on the water; the Throne being on the water precede His writing everything in the Reminder; and His writing everything in the Reminder precede the⁶² creation of the heavens and the earth. There is absolutely no mention in this of the first of the created things. Moreover, there is no information in it about the creation of the Throne and the water, even though all of that was created, as he has informed about that in other places. His intention in answering the People of Yemen was only to inform them about the beginning of the creation of the heavens and the earth and what is between them, that is, the created things that were created in six days, and not about the start of what God created before that.

[Aspect 5: The hadith indicates that the Throne was on the water before the creation of the heavens and the earth]

The fifth aspect is that he mentioned those things in a way that indicates their being (*kawn*) and their existence (*wujūd*). [218] He did not broach the start of their creation, whereas he mentioned the heavens and the earth in a way that indicates their creation. Whether his statement is, ‘And He created the heavens and the earth’, or ‘Then He created the heavens and the earth’, in both propositions he informed about their creation. Every created thing is originated [and came into] being after it was not (*muhdath kā'in ba'd an lam yakun*), even if it has been created from matter (*māddah*). Similarly, [we find] in the *Sahīh* of Muslim, from 'Ā'isha—God be pleased with her—from the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—that he said, ‘God created the angels from light. He created the jinn from a smokeless fire. He created Adam from what has been described to you.’⁶³

If the wording of the Messenger—God bless him and give him peace—is, ‘Then (*thumma*) He created’, this indicates that the creation

⁶¹ *ja'l al-waw li-tartib* R: *al-waw* FM

⁶² — : *taqdim* FM

⁶³ Muslim 5314, Al-Zuhd wa-l-raqā'iq, Min al-hādīth mutafarriqa / Ṣiddīqī (trans.), *Sahīh Muslim*, 4. 1540 (7134).

of the heavens and the earth was after what he had mentioned previously, namely, His Throne being on the water and His writing in the Reminder. This wording is worthier of the Messenger of God—God bless him and give him peace—because it [gives] complete evidence, and what is intended through the term of sequence [*thumma*] is obtained.

And if his wording is, ‘And’, the course of the speech indicates that his intention was that He created the heavens and the earth after that. As the rest of the texts indicate, it is indeed known that his intention was not to inform about the creation of the Throne or the water, to say nothing of the fact that he did not intend that the creation of this was conjoined to the creation of the heavens and the earth. As there is nothing in the wording that indicates either the creation of this, or⁶⁴ the conjoining of its creation with the creation of the heavens and the earth—indeed, he informed about the creation of the heavens with its being—then it is known that what he intended is that [God] created the heavens and the earth when [219] the Throne was on the water. Similarly, He informed about that in the Qur’ān. Then, the Throne must have been on the water before the creation of the heavens and the earth, as he has informed of this in the authentic ḥadīth where he said, ‘God determined the determinations of created things fifty thousand years before He created the heavens and the earth, and His Throne was on the water.’⁶⁵ He informed that this determination which preceded the creation of the heavens and the earth by fifty thousand years [happened] when His Throne was on the water.

[Aspects 6-8: *The ḥadīth says nothing about the very first thing God created*]

The sixth aspect is that the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—either had said, [I] ‘He was, and there was nothing before Him’, or he had said [II] ‘there was nothing with Him’, or [III] ‘other than Him’.

If he uttered only the first wording, there is no opposition in this to His existence—Exalted is He—before all originating events.

If he uttered the second or the third, then [in the second case] his intention in his statement, ‘There was nothing with Him, and His Throne was on the water. And He wrote everything in the Reminder’, is either [IIa] that ‘His Throne was on the water’ when there was nothing with Him, or [IIb] that ‘His Throne was on the water’ after that. If he intends the first [IIa], its meaning is that none of this matter

⁶⁴ *wa-lā ‘alā: illā* FM

⁶⁵ Muslim, 4797, Al-Qadar, Ḥijāj Ādām wa-Mūsā / Ṣiddīqī (trans.), *Sahīḥ Muslim*, 4. 1396–7 (6416).

asked about, namely, this world, was with Him, and his intention is that God was before this visible world **while His Throne was on the water.** As for the third division [IIb]⁶⁶—namely, that its sense is that there was nothing with Him, and **after that His Throne was on the water** and He wrote [everything] in the Reminder and then He created the heavens [220] and the earth—there is no information in this about the first thing God created absolutely. Moreover, there is no information therein about the creation of the Throne and the water; rather, there is therein only his information about the creation of the heavens and the earth. Also, he did not state clearly therein that the Throne being on the water was after that. Instead, he mentioned it with the grammatical particle ‘and’ (*waw*), and ‘and’ is [used] for the indeterminate combination and association of two conjoined terms. As the *hadith* does not expound on the first of the created things and does not mention when the creation of the Throne [happened], which he informed was on the water, in connection with his statement, ‘God was, and there was nothing with Him’, then this indicates that the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—did not intend to inform about the existence of God alone before everything or about the start of created things after that. [This is so] since his wording does not indicate that. He intended only to inform about the start of the creation of the heavens and the earth.

The seventh aspect consists in saying that it is not permissible to affirm the meaning that the Messenger—God bless him and give him peace—intended except by means of an indicator indicating his intention. For if it is thought that his wording could carry one meaning or another, it is not permissible to affirm one of them except by means of an indicator. So, when one of the two is preponderant, whoever affirms that the Messenger—God bless him and give him peace⁶⁷—**intended the other meaning is in error.**

The eighth aspect consists of saying that if [God’s existence alone before the start of created things] were truly the unknown matter [that was asked about], it would be **too tremendous [a matter] to be argued from a [merely] likely wording in a report transmitted by only one person.** Mention of this in the Qur’ān and the Sunna would have been among the most important matters **due to the people’s need to know** [221] this [and] because of the **ambiguity, controversy, and difference among people that occurs over this.** Since there is nothing in the Sunna indicating **this [to be] the unknown matter [asked about],** it is not

⁶⁶ That is, the third after I and IIa. Ibn Taymiyya never takes up III in this aspect.

⁶⁷ *sallama FR: an + M*

permissible to establish it by means of what one supposes the meaning of the *ḥadīth* in its context to be.

[Proponents of God's existence alone before created things] heard only that the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—said, ‘He⁶⁸ was, and there was nothing with Him’. So, they supposed it was an established expression, isolated from the other words coming from the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace. They supposed its meaning to inform about His precedence—Exalted is He—over everything, and on these two suppositions, they based an ascription of that to the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace. About neither one of the two premisses, however, do they have any knowledge, not even a supposition, resting on any evidence.

Let us admit that they did not affirm that his intention was the other meaning. Then, they have nothing making it necessary to affirm this meaning. Doubt arises among them, and they impute to the Messenger something of which they have no knowledge that he said. However, He—Exalted is He—has said, ‘And do not follow that about which you have no knowledge’ (Q. 17. 36). He—Exalted is He—said, ‘Say, ‘My Lord has only forbidden abominations, the inward and the outward, misdeeds and unrighteous oppression, and that you associate with God that for which He never sent down authority, and that you say about God that which you do not know’ (Q. 7. 33). None of this is permissible.

[Aspect 10:⁶⁹ *The addition, ‘He is now as He was’, has not been transmitted*]

The tenth aspect is that some people have added to it ‘And He is now as He was’ (*wa-huwa al-ān ‘alā mā ‘alayhi kān*). Some people only added this addition from themselves. It is not in any of the transmitted readings. Then, some of them interpret it [as meaning] that there is no existent (*mawjūd*) with Him now, [and that], rather, His existence is the very existence of created things, as say the adherents [222] of the Oneness of Existence (*wahdat al-wujūd*), who say that the very existence of the Creator is the very existence of the created. Ibn ‘Arabī, Ibn Sab‘īn, al-Qunawī, al-Tilimsānī, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, and their like say this.⁷⁰ This view

⁶⁸ — M: *Allāh* F

⁶⁹ As noted in the Introduction, no ‘ninth aspect’ appears in the text.

⁷⁰ The addition ‘And He is now as He was’ has been attributed to the Sufi al-Junayd (d. 298/910). However, Ibn ‘Arabī says that adding this contributes nothing new to the meaning of the *ḥadīth*. On this, see William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 393–4, n. 13. Al-Ghazālī cites the addition in question in his creed early in *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm ad-dīn* (Beirut: Dār

is among things known necessarily by **revelation and reason** (*shar'an wa-'aqlan*) **to be vain.**

[Aspect 11: *It is erroneous to think that there are only two views on the world—I) the eternity of the world (philosophers) and II) a beginning to God's originating activity (Kalām theologians)—and that tradition supports the second view]*

The eleventh aspect is that many people take this [*hadīth*] as their support from tradition (*sam'*) [for the view] that originating events had a start and that **the genus of originating events was preceded by nonexistence**, since⁷¹ they did not find anything in the Book and the Sunna speaking about it.⁷² Also, they relate this about Muslims, Jews and Christians. Likewise, such as this exists in the books of **most theologians of innovating Kalām in Islam whom the salaf found blameworthy.** With this they opposed revelation and reason. Some of them relate it as the **consensus** of the Muslims, but they have **no tradition** (*naql*) for this, neither from one of the Companions and their Followers in beneficence nor from the Book and the Sunna, to say nothing of it being the view of all the Muslims.

Some of them are of the opinion that whoever opposes this has spoken of the eternity of the world and has agreed with **the eternalist philosophers** (*al-falāsifa al-dahriyya*)⁷³ because they have examined

al-ma'rifa, n.d.), 1. 90, but not in conjunction with the *hadīth* of Imrān b. Huṣayn on creation. In *Irshād al-sārī li-sharb Ṣabīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Bulaq, Cairo: Al-Matba'a al-kubrā al-amīriyya, 1305/1887–8, 6th printing; reprint, Beirut: Dār ihyā' al-turāth al-'arabī, n.d.), 5. 247, the Cairene *hadīth* commentator Abū 'Abbās Shihāb al-Dīn Ahmad b. Muhammād al-Qastallānī (d. 923/1517) notes in passing Ibn Taymiyya's observation that the addition is not found in the authoritative books of *hadīth*. For Ibn Taymiyya's critique of Ibn 'Arabī and others whom he links to the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd*, see Alexander Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1999), 87–111, with the corrections to Knysh in my review in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 10: 3 (Oct. 1999), 392–4.

⁷¹ *idh* F: *idhā* M

⁷² Although Kalām defences of the **temporal origination** of the world often make **no reference at all to the Qur'ān and the Hadith**, the *hadīth* 'God was, and there was nothing with Him' does appear as the sole support from tradition in *al-Shahrastānī, Kitāb niḥāyatū 'l-iqdām*, 5–53 (Arabic text). In *al-Maṭālib al-'āliyya*, 4. 29–33, al-Rāzī surveys evidence on creation from the Qur'ān and the Torah and concludes that neither book proves the temporal origination of the world definitively, but he does not examine *hadīth* reports on creation.

⁷³ Elsewhere, Ibn Taymiyya indicates that the term 'eternalist philosophers' designates 'al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, those like them, and their predecessors from Greece' (MF 12. 225).

many books of Kalām theology and found only two views in them: [I] the view of the philosophers who speak of the eternity of the world, either its form or its matter, whether it is said to be self-existent or caused by another; and [II] the view of those Kalām theologians who refute them, [IIa] such as the Jahmīs, the Mu'tazilīs, and the Karrāmīs, who say that [223] the Lord had been neither doing anything nor speaking anything from eternity and then originated speech and action without any cause fundamentally. [IIb] Another group, like the Kullābīs and those who have agreed with them, say instead that the speech is eternal in itself (*qadīm al-'ayn*), either as one meaning or as eternal, pre-eternal letters and sounds that are eternal in themselves. These say that the Lord had been neither doing anything nor speaking by virtue of His will and His power from eternity and then what originates originated by His power and His will, either subsisting in His essence or disjoined from Him according to those who permit this, or [only] disjoined from Him according to those who do not permit the subsistence of this in His essence.

It is known that this [Kalām] view is closer in resemblance to what the Messengers informed about, namely, that God is Creator of everything and that God created the heavens and the earth in six days. Whoever is of the opinion that people have only these two views and believes that the Messengers spoke only truth is of the opinion that this is the view of the Messengers and those who followed them. Then, if it is demanded of him to relate this view from the Messengers, he cannot do that, and no one is able to come up with a verse or a *hadīth* indicating this, neither in the letter nor the plain sense. Moreover, he is not able to relate this from any of the Companions of the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—and their Followers in beneficence.

They took this [view] to be the meaning of the origination (*budūth*) of the world, which is the first issue in [the discipline of] the principles [224] of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*) for them. It therefore remains that, [concerning] the fundamental principle of the religion that is the religion of the Messengers for them, they have nothing by which to know that the Messenger said it and nothing in reason indicating it. Rather, reason and tradition indicate the opposite of it. Whoever does not know whether the Messenger came with the fundamental principle of his religion, which for him is the religion of God and His Messenger, is among the most erring of people concerning his religion.

[Aspect 12: The Kalām argument that ‘originating events without a beginning’ is impossible led to denying what tradition tells us about

God's attributes and, then, by virtue of its error, to the ascendance of philosophers teaching the eternity of the world]

The twelfth aspect is that, as [the Jahmī and Mu'tazilī Kalām theologians] believed that this is the religion of Islam, they began arguing for it with rational arguments known to them. Their base, which is the greatest of the arguments, rests on the impossibility of originating events without a beginning.⁷⁴ By means of it, they established the origination of everything qualifiable with an attribute, and they called that establishing the origination of bodies. Following necessarily for them from that was denying the attributes of the Lord—He is Mighty and Great—and that He has no knowledge, no power, and no speech subsisting in Him. Rather, His speech is created and disjoined from Him, and likewise, His good pleasure and his anger. From that, they made it follow necessarily that God is not seen in the hereafter, that He is not over the Throne, and other necessary concomitants (*lawāzim*) by means of which they denied what God and His Messenger have established. The reality of what they said belied what the Messenger—God bless him and give him peace—brought. Experts in the rational sciences overturned these arguments of theirs and made their corruption obvious.

This is among the things that gave authority to the eternalist [philosophers] speaking of the eternity of the world, as they knew the reality of what they said and their proofs and forgot about its corruption. Further, when they supposed that this [Kalām view] was what the Messenger—God bless him and give him peace—had said and believed it to be vain, they said that the Messenger had not made [225] the realities plain, irrespective of whether he knew them or not, and that he only addressed the mass [of people] with what would inspire them to imagine what would profit them. So, those Kalām theologians who deny [the attributes] began to err in matters of tradition and reason (*fi al-sam'iyyāt wa-l-aqliyyāt*), and their error became one of the biggest

⁷⁴ Ibn Taymiyya does not attempt to refute the Kalām rational arguments against an infinite regress in this treatise, but he does refute some of them in *Minhāj* 1. 432–8 and *Dar'* 9. 186–8. In *Fatḥ al-bārī: Sharḥ Ṣahīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz b. 'Abd Allāh b. Bāz (Riyadh: Dār al-salām, 1421/2000), 13. 504–5, Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449) observes that the *ḥadīth* of Imrān, especially in the form 'God was, and there was nothing with Him', is the clearest [textual] refutation of an infinite regression of originating events. He adds that adherence to this idea 'is part of what is deemed abominable of propositions (*min mustashna'* *al-masa'il*) ascribed to Ibn Taymiyya' (13. 504). In a footnote, the modern editor of *Fatḥ al-bārī* offers a reference to 'Imrān and a succinct defence of Ibn Taymiyya's view.

causes of the authority acquired by the philosophers. When those eternalist philosophers supposed that there were only two views concerning this unknown matter, [namely] the view of those Kalām theologians and their [own] view, and [when] they saw that the view of the former was vain, they made that into an argument for the correctness of their [own] view. However, the eternalist philosophers have no rational argument fundamentally for what they say about the eternity of the [celestial] spheres. One of the greatest reasons for this was that they had no real knowledge of that with which God raised up his Messenger—God bless him and give him peace.

[Aspect 13: Some like *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* got confused between the irrational views of the philosophers and the Kalām theologians. Contrary to the philosophers, reason dictates that originated things come into existence in time after not existing, and, contrary to the Kalām theologians, reason dictates that God could not have become an agent after not having been one without a cause. The rational view is that God in His perfection has been perpetually creating individual things, each of which is originated and preceded by nonexistence. The philosophers, by conjoining enacted things to God eternally, strip God of His activity]

The thirteenth aspect is that error concerning the meaning of this *hadīth* [derives] from not knowing the texts of the Book and the Sunna, and moreover, what has been reasoned clearly. This has made many thinkers and their followers fall into confusion and go astray. They knew of only two views: the view of the eternalist [philosophers] speaking of the eternity [of the world] and the view of the Jahmī [Kalām theologians] who say that He had been stripped (*mu'attal*) [of His ability] to act or speak by His power and His will from eternity. They saw that the necessary concomitants of either view entailed its corruption and its contradiction. So, they remained confused, doubting, and ignorant. This was the state of an uncountable number of them. Some of them even clearly stated this about themselves. For example, [*Fakhr al-Dīn*] al-Rāzī and others stated it clearly.

Among the greatest reasons for this is that they looked into the reality of what the philosophers were saying and found that the concretized (*mu'aayan*), enacted thing had been conjoined with the Agent pre-eternally and post-eternally. Clear [226] reason requires, [however], that the Agent must inevitably precede His act. Positing something enacted by the Agent together with positing that it has been conjoined with Him from eternity [in such a way that] the Agent did not precede it—rather, it is with Him pre-eternally and post-eternally—is a matter contradicting clear reason. It has been firmly established in [our] natural

constitutions (*fīṭra*) that for something enacted to be a created thing requires that it be after it was not. Therefore, what God informed of in His Book, namely, that He created the heavens and the earth, is among the things that⁷⁵ make all creatures understand that [the heavens and the earth] originated after they were not.⁷⁶ As for positing their being with Him from eternity, **despite their being created by Him, [our] natural constitutions deny this.** And no one has said this except a very small group of **eternalists such as Ibn Sīnā and those like him.** As for the great majority of the eternalist philosophers, such as Aristotle and his followers, they **did not say that the [celestial] spheres were caused by an efficient cause ('illa fā'ilā), as [Ibn Sīnā and those like him] say.**⁷⁷ Moreover, even though the view of [Aristotle and his followers] was more corrupt than the view of those who came later, **they did not oppose clear reason on this point—which [the later ones] opposed—although they opposed it from other angles.**

And [then those like Rāzī who got confused] looked into the reality of what the Jahmī and Qadarī Kalām theologians and those who followed them were saying, found that the Agent became an agent after He was not an agent, without anything originating to necessitate His being an agent, and saw that clear reason requires that since He became an agent after He was not an agent, something must inevitably have originated. [They also saw] that it is impossible in reason that [being an agent] became possible after it was impossible without origination, **that no cause necessitates the occurrence of a time [waqt] of origination at the time of origination,** and that origination of the genus of time is impossible.

So, they came [227] to **suppose that if they synthesized** [the Kalām theologians with the philosophers], synthesis of the two contradictories would follow necessarily, namely, [I] that the Agent is before the act and [II] **that it is impossible for Him to become an agent after He was not [one],** in which case the act is with Him, so that the act is [at once] [II] **conjoined (muqārin)** and [I] not conjoined—that is, being after it was not, originating [in time], preceded by nonexistence. It is impossible from this perspective [II] that the act of the Agent be preceded by nonexistence. [On the contrary] it is necessary in the first perspective [I] that the act of the Agent be preceded by nonexistence. **So, they found their intellects unable to cope with what**⁷⁸ the latter affirmation [I] makes necessary and what the former negation [II] makes necessary.

⁷⁵ *mimmā* F: *bi-mā* M

⁷⁶ *takūnā* F: *yakūnā* M

⁷⁷ At the end of this aspect ('Imrān 230), Ibn Taymiyya explains Aristotle's view that God is the final cause, but not the efficient cause, of the celestial spheres.

⁷⁸ *'ammā* F: *bi-mā* M

The synthesis of two contradictories was impossible, and so this made them fall into confusion and doubt.

One of the causes of this is that they did not know the reality of tradition and reason. They did not know what the Book and the Sunna indicated, and concerning the intelligibles (*ma'qūlāt*), they did not distinguish between ambiguous things. That is to say, reason differentiates between the Speaker speaking one thing after another perpetually (*dā'imān*) and the Agent doing one thing after another perpetually and the units of act and speech.⁷⁹ So, [reason] says that every one of His acts must inevitably be preceded by the Agent and be preceded by nonexistence. It is impossible that the concretized act should be with the Agent pre-eternally and post-eternally. As for the Agent having committed one act after another from eternity, this is part of the perfection of the Agent.

Since the Agent is living, and [since] it is said that life makes acting and movement follow necessarily—as the imāms of the Hadith experts such as Bukhārī, Dārimī and others have said, and [since, moreover, it is said] that He has been speaking when He wills and what He wills and such like from eternity—as Ibn al-Mubārak, Ahmād [b. Ḥanbal] and other [228] imāms of the experts of Hadith and Sunna have said—then His being speaking or acting is among the necessary concomitants (*lawāzim*) of His life. Now His life is a necessary concomitant of Him; so, He has been speaking and acting from eternity. Together with [this, however, goes] the knowledge that the Living speaks and acts by His will and His power and that this necessitates the existence of one word after another and of one act after another. The Agent precedes every one of His acts, and this necessitates that everything other than Him be originated and created. We do not say that He was at any moment without power until He created.⁸⁰ Whoever does not have power is [indeed] impotent ('ājiz). We say, rather, that God has been knowing, powerful, and sovereign from eternity, without anything being similar to Him (*lā shibba labu*), and without [defining] any modality (*wa-lā kayf*).⁸¹ With God none of the things He does (*maf'ūlāt*) are eternal with Him. No, on the contrary, He is Creator of everything; everything other than Him is a creation of His, and every created thing is originated, being after it was not, even if it is assumed that He has been creating and acting from eternity.

⁷⁹ This distinction is elaborated later in *'Imrān* 234–5 and 239–40.

⁸⁰ *khalqa M*: [*labu qudra*] + F: *li-nafsihi qudratan fa-qadara* + R

⁸¹ M and its MS source include an additional eight lines of text which, as R notes, have been interpolated from another source and which are not translated here. See n. 21 for explanation of Ibn Taymiyya's view of God's dissimilarity from creatures.

As it is said that creating is an attribute of perfection (*ṣifāt kamāl*) because of His statement—Exalted is He—‘Is He who creates like one who does not create?’ (Q. 16. 17), is it not⁸² possible that His creativity is perpetual (*khāliqiyatuhu dā’iman*), everything created by Him is originated and preceded by nonexistence, and nothing eternal is with God? This is more profoundly perfect than being stripped [of attributes and] unable to act, and then becoming powerful such that acting [becomes] possible for Him without a cause.

As for making the concretized, enacted thing conjoined with Him pre-eternally and post-eternally, this is in reality stripping away His creating and His acting. For the Agent’s being conjoined with the thing He does pre-eternally and post-eternally conflicts with clear reason. [229] Even if these eternalist philosophers claim that they establish the perpetuity of agency (*dawām al-fa’iliyya*), they are, in reality, stripping away the agency, even though it is the attribute that is the most obvious of the Lord’s attributes—Exalted is He—and therefore, information about it comes in the first of what He sent down to the Messenger—God bless him and give him peace.

Indeed, the first thing [He revealed] is: ‘Recite! In the name of your Lord who created, created the human being from a blood-clot. Recite! And your Lord is the most generous, who taught by the Pen, taught the human being what he did not know’ (Q. 96. 1–5). He spoke of creation in the absolute, and then He spoke in particular of the human being. He spoke of teaching in the absolute, and then He spoke in particular of teaching by the Pen. Creation includes what He does, and teaching includes what He says. For He teaches by His speaking, and His speaking is by revelation, by speaking from behind a veil, and by sending a Messenger who by His authorization reveals what He wills (cf. Q. 42. 51). He—Exalted is He—said, ‘He taught you that which you did not know’ (Q. 4. 113). He—Exalted is He—said, ‘And whoever disputes with you concerning Him after the knowledge that has come to you’ (Q. 3. 61). He—Exalted is He—said, ‘Do not be in haste with the Qur’ān before its revelation to you is completed, and say, “My Lord! Increase me in knowledge!”’ (Q. 20. 114). He—Exalted is He—said, ‘The All-Merciful, He taught the Qur’ān. He created the human being. He taught him the Explanation. The sun and the moon follow a computation’ (Q. 55: 1–5).

What these philosophers say implies in reality that He did not create and did not teach. What they do establish with respect to creation and teaching indeed implies only stripping away [His attributes] (*ta’til*). According to what they say, the [celestial] sphere has been conjoined

⁸² *a-fa-lā* M: — F

to Him pre-eternally and post-eternally. Thus, it is then impossible that it be something enacted by Him, since the Agent must inevitably precede His act. For them, He knows none of the particulars of knowledge.⁸³ Now, teaching is a branch of knowledge, and it is impossible for someone who does not know particulars [230] to teach them to someone else. Moreover, every existent is particular, not universal. Similarly, the existence of universals is only in minds, not in concrete things.⁸⁴ If He knows none of the particulars, He knows none of the existents. So, it is impossible that He teach someone else any knowledge of concretized existents. The view of those of them who said that He knows neither the universal nor the particular is viler.

As for those who said that He knows the established universals (*al-kulliyāt al-thābita*) but not the mutable things (*al-mutaghayyira*)—for them, He does not know any of the originating events, and He does not teach them to any of His creatures, just as what they said requires that He did not create them. According to their view, therefore, He did not create and He did not teach. This is the reality of what their leader Aristotle said. For he did not establish that the Lord is Originator (*mubdī*) of the world, and he did not make Him an efficient cause ('*illa fā'ila*). Instead, what he established was that He is a final cause ('*illa ghā'iyya*): the [celestial] sphere moves in order to assimilate itself to Him, like a beloved moving a lover. He plainly stated that He does not know things. So, for him, He did not create or teach. However, the first thing God sent down to his Prophet Muḥammad—God bless him and give him peace—was, ‘Recite! In the name of your Lord who created, created the human being from a blood-clot. Recite! And your Lord is the most generous, who taught by the Pen, taught the human being what he did not know’ (Q. 96. 1–5).

[Aspect 14: *God and His Messengers have informed us of the creation of (I) this world in six days, (II) the precedence of God's names and attributes such that they are necessary concomitants of His perfection, and (III) the creation of the celestial spheres and the heavens and the earth from preceding matter and in preceding time]*

The fourteenth aspect is that God—Exalted is He—sent the Messengers and sent down the Books to call creatures to worship Him alone, without His having a partner, and this implies His knowledge

⁸³ In *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, 128–46, al-Ghazālī also criticizes the philosophers for denying God's knowledge of particulars and, as Ibn Taymiyya does in the following paragraph, al-Ghazālī rejects Ibn Sīnā's idea that God knows things other than Himself only in a universal way.

⁸⁴ On Ibn Taymiyya's denial of real universals, see Wael Hallaq, *Ibn Taymiyya against the Greek Logicians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), xx–xxiv.

of the created things that He originated (*abda'a*), that is, the visible, existent, created things: the heavens and the earth and what is between the two.

[I] Now, He informed in⁸⁵ the Book, than which no book better in guidance has come from Him, [231] that He created the foundations of these visible, existent created things in six days and then sat upon the Throne. He also legislated for⁸⁶ people of belief that they gather one day every week during which they would worship God and celebrate that, and this would be a sign of the first week during which God created the heavens and the earth.

The week is indeed known only from information given by the Prophets. The names of the days of the week have come in their discourse—Peace be upon them. Naming follows conception,⁸⁷ and the name expresses what it has conceived. The concepts of day, month, or year are known by reason; [intelligence] conceived [what is meant] by such names and expressed it. As for the week, since there is nothing in mere reason that leads one to know it, and it is known only by tradition, knowledge of it comes [only to be found] with people of tradition learning it from the Prophets, not with others.

This being so, [the Prophets] informed the people about the creation of this visible, existent world, the start of its creation, and that He created it in six days. As for what He created before that, one thing after another, this is like what He will create after the Resurrection takes place and the People of Paradise and the People of the Fire enter their abodes: this belongs to that which servants have no way of gaining detailed knowledge.

This is why 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb—God be pleased with him—said, ‘The Messenger of God—God bless him and give him peace—stood up among us, and he informed us about the beginning of the creation up to the point that the People of Paradise enter their abodes and the People of the Fire their abodes.’⁸⁸ Bukhārī transmits this. The Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—informed them about the beginning of the creation through to the entry of the People of Paradise and the Fire into their abodes. [232] His statement, ‘The beginning of the creation’, is like His statement in the other *hadīth*, ‘God determined the determinations of created things fifty thousand years before

⁸⁵ [fī] F: — M

⁸⁶ *lī-* FR: — M

⁸⁷ *al-tasmiyya tattabi'* *al-taṣawwur* R: *al-tasmiyya tattabi'* *al-nuṣūṣ* F: *al-nafs yattabi'* *al-nuṣūṣ* M

⁸⁸ Bukhārī 2953, Bad' al-khalq, Mā jā'a fi qawl Allāh ta'āla wa-huwa alladhi yabda' al-khalq... / Khān (trans.), *Šahīh Al-Bukhārī*, 4. 278–9 (no. 414).

He created the heavens and the earth.⁸⁹ What is intended here by ‘created things’ are the known created things that were created after the creation of the Throne and its being on the water. Therefore, the determination of created things was the determination of the creation of this world. Similarly, in the *ḥadīth* of the Pen, when God created [the Pen], ‘He said, “Write!” It said, “What shall I write?” He said, “What will be until the Day of the resurrection”’.⁹⁰ Similarly, [one finds] in the authentic *ḥadīth*, ‘God determined the determinations of created things fifty thousand years before He created the heavens and the earth, and His Throne was on the water’.⁹¹ [There is] also his statement in the other authentic *ḥadīth*, ‘God was, and there was nothing before Him. And His Throne was on the water. And He wrote everything in the Reminder. Then, He created the heavens and the earth’.⁹² What is intended by this is that He wrote all of that which He willed to create. The word ‘everything’ is in each place general, according to its context, as in His statement, ‘knowing everything’ (Q. 2. 29), and ‘powerful over everything’ (Q. 59. 6), and His statement, ‘God is Creator of everything’ (Q. 13. 16), ‘destroying everything’ (Q. 46. 25), ‘she has been given everything’ (Q. 27. 23), ‘We opened to them the gates of everything’ (Q. 6. 44), and ‘Of everything We have created pairs’⁹³ (Q. 51. 49).

[II] Now, the Messengers informed about the precedence (*taqaddum*) of His names and His attributes, as in His statement, ‘God is allmighty, all-wise’ (Q. 4. 158), ‘hearing, seeing’ (Q. 4. 58), ‘forgiving, merciful’ (Q. 4. 23), and such like. Ibn ‘Abbās said, ‘He is and does not cease [being] (*kāna wa lā yazāl*).’ His being (*kawn*) has not been restricted by one time instead of another, [233] and it is impossible for something other than Him to originate an attribute for Him. Moreover, it is impossible that any of His necessary concomitants depend upon something other than Him—Glory be to Him. He [it is] who has the right to the utmost perfection, and His essence (*dhāt*) is That which requires that necessarily. Thus, nothing of His perfection, nor of the necessary concomitants of His perfection, nor, even more, His Holy Self, depends on other than Him. It is He who is praiseworthy for this pre-eternally and post-eternally, and it is He who praises Himself and lauds [Himself] with that to which He has a right. As for another

⁸⁹ Muslim, 4797, Al-Qadar, Ḥijāj Ādām wa-Mūsā / Ṣiddīqī (trans.), *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4. 1396–7 (6416).

⁹⁰ Abū Dā’ūd 4078, Al-Sunna, Fī al-qadar; Tirmidhī 2081, Al-Qadar ‘an Rasūl Allāh, Mā jā’a fī al-ridā bi-l-qadā’.

⁹¹ Muslim, 4797, Al-Qadar, Ḥijāj Ādām wa-Mūsā / Ṣiddīqī (trans.), *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4. 1396–7 (6416).

⁹² Bukhārī 6868, Al-Tawhīd, Wa-kāna ‘arshuhu ‘alā al-mā’...

⁹³ — F: *ithnayn* M

[than Him], he [cannot] reckon the laudation due [to God]. Rather, He is Himself as He has lauded Himself. [This is] as the Master of the Sons of Adam said in the authentic *hadīth*, ‘O God! I seek refuge in Your good pleasure from Your wrath and in Your pardon from Your punishment. I seek refuge in You from You. I cannot reckon the laudation due to You. You are as You have lauded Yourself.’⁹⁴

If it is said that He was not speaking and then He spoke, or [if] it is said that speech was impossible and then became possible for Him, then this—besides its qualifying Him with deficiency in pre-eternity (*fi al-azal*) and with perfection arising newly for Him, and besides its assimilation of Him to the created thing which turns from deficiency to perfection—[then this] is impossible from the viewpoint that the impossible does not become possible without a cause. Now, there is nothing in pure non-existence. It is therefore impossible that what is impossible, as far as He is concerned, should become possible without a cause originating.

Similarly, if it is said that all of His speech is one meaning necessarily concomitant to His essence, with respect to which He has neither power nor will, this is in reality stripping away [His] speech and synthesizing two contradictories since it is establishing an existent having no reality. Moreover, it is impossible that it be an existent, with it having nothing praiseworthy or of perfection in it.

[234] Similarly, if it is said that all of His speech is eternal in respect of concrete entity (*qadim al-'ayn*) and [that] it is eternal letters and sounds necessarily concomitant to His essence, with respect to which He has neither power nor will, then, along with what is obvious of its contradiction and its corruption with respect to reason, there is no perfection in Him, since He speaks neither by His will nor His power, not even if He so wills.

As for the view of one who says that His speech is nothing but what He creates in other than Him, this is stripping away His speech in every respect, and the reality of it is that He is not speaking, as the early *Jahmīs* said. This is negating the attributes. There is indeed therein contradiction and corruption inasmuch as they established speech as known by everybody but negated its necessary concomitants. What becomes obvious thereby is that it is one of the most corrupt things said in the whole world. [The *Jahmīs*] indeed established that He commands and prohibits, informs and brings glad tidings, warns and proclaims,

⁹⁴ Muslim 751, Al-Šalāh, Mā yuqālu fi al-rukū' wa-l-sujūd / Ṣiddīq (trans.), *Sahīb Muslim*, 1. 255–6 (986); Tirmidhī 3484; Nasā'i 169, 1118, 1727; Abū Dā'ud 745, 1215; Ibn Mājah 1169, 3831; Ahmād 712, 911, 1228, 23176, 24475.

without any of that subsisting in Him. Likewise, they said that He wills, loves, hates, and gets angry without any of this subsisting in Him. Now, in this there is opposition to clear reason and authentic tradition that has been mentioned in another place.⁹⁵

As for those who speak of the eternity of this world, they are further from reason and tradition than all the groups. This is why they denied speech subsisting in His essence and that which He creates in other than Him. For them, His speech is nothing other than the intelligibles and the imagined [forms] that originate in souls, and for them this is the meaning of His speaking to Moses—peace be upon him. The speaking refers merely to the knowledge of the one spoken to. Then, when they say, besides this, that He does not know the particulars, then there is no knowledge and no making known. This is the utmost in stripping away [His attributes] and in deficiency.

Now, they have absolutely no proof [235] for the eternity of any [part] of the world. Instead, their arguments indicate only the eternity of the species (*naw'*) of acting and that the Agent has been acting from eternity, or [that] there has been a period of time (*mudda*) for His acting from eternity, or that there has been [preceding] matter for the matter [of created things] from eternity. In none of their proofs is there anything that indicates the eternity of the [celestial] sphere, or the eternity of any of its movements, or the eternity of the time (*zamān*) that is the measure of the movements of the [celestial] sphere.⁹⁶

[III] The Messengers have informed about the creation of the [celestial] spheres and of the creation of the time that is the measure of their movements. Besides that, they informed that they were created from matter before that and at a time before that time. He—Glory be to Him—indeed informed that He created the heavens and the earth in six days.

Now, whether it be said that those days were of the [same] measure as these days that are measured by the rising of the sun and its setting or whether it be said that they were longer than them—some people

⁹⁵ What work Ibn Taymiyya might have had in mind is unclear. For an overview of his approach to God's attributes which includes his criticism of Kalām theologians who deny that certain attributes subsist in God, see *al-Tadmuriyya*, MF 3. 3–34.

⁹⁶ The notion that time is the measure of movement is Aristotelian. However, Ibn Taymiyya denies the eternity of what we currently perceive to be time because he denies the eternity of the celestial sphere, the measure of whose movement, in Aristotle's view, is time. With this, Ibn Taymiyya opens the door to the relativity of time, as elaborated in what follows in the text. On the various concepts of time in the Islamic philosophical tradition, see the article ‘*Zamān*’ by D. Mallet in *EI²* 11. 434–8, and its references.

have indeed said that the measure of each day was one thousand years—there is no doubt that those days in which the heavens and the earth were created were different from these days and different from the time that is the measure of the movements of these [celestial] spheres. Those days were [in fact] measured by the movements of bodies existent before the creation of the heavens and the earth.

He—Glory be to Him—has informed that ‘He rose over the heaven when it was smoke, and He said to it and to the earth, “Come willingly or unwillingly”’. They both said, “We come, willingly”’ (Q. 41. 11). So, they were created from smoke. Traditions (*āthār*) have come from the *salaf* that they were created from water vapour. This is the water, which the Throne was on, that is mentioned in His statement, ‘He it is who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and His Throne was on the water’ (Q. 11. 7).⁹⁷

He informed that He created the heavens and the earth in an interval of time and from matter. The Qur’ān did not mention the creation of anything [236] out of nothing (*min lā shay'*). Instead, it mentioned that He created the created thing after it was nothing. Similarly, He said, ‘I have created you before, and you were nothing’ (Q. 19. 9), in addition to His informing that He created him from a drop [of semen] (cf. Q. 16. 4, 53. 46, etc.)

There are two views concerning His statement, ‘Were they created without anything (*min ghayr shay'*) or were they themselves the creators?’ (Q. 52. 35). Most hold that the meaning is, ‘Were they created without a creator or, even, of pure nonexistence?’, as He—Exalted is He—said, ‘He has subjected to you what is in the heavens and what is in the earth, all of it from Him’ (Q. 45. 13), and as He—Exalted is He—said, ‘And His word that He bestowed on Mary and a spirit from Him’ (Q. 4. 171). And He—Exalted is He—said, ‘Whatever of blessing you have is from God’ (Q. 16. 53).

It was also said, ‘Were they created without matter?’⁹⁸ This is weak because of His statement after this, ‘Or were they themselves the creators?’ That indeed indicated that the [correct] disjunction (*taqṣīm*) was, ‘Were they created without a creator or were they themselves

⁹⁷ Ibn Taymiyya gives a longer but similar discussion of God’s creation out of preceding matter in *Minhāj* 1. 360–4.

⁹⁸ With this second interpretation, Ibn Taymiyya may have in mind Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who in his *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 28. 259–60, interprets ‘without anything?’ in Q. 52. 35 to mean without dust or water and supports this with Q. 77. 20, ‘Did We not create you from water of no value?’ Al-Rāzī also explains that if creatures were not created from something—as opposed to nothing—some foolish people (*ba'd al-aghbiyā'*) might think that creatures just come into existence without the Creator.

the creators?’ If ‘without matter’ had been intended, He would have said, ‘Were they created without anything, or from water of no value?’ (cf. Q. 32. 8, 77. 20). This indicated that the meaning was, ‘I am their creator’, and not their matter.

[It is weak also] because in the fact of their having been created without matter, there is therein no stripping away the existence of the Creator. If they were of that opinion, it would not have impaired their belief in the Creator, but instead, indicated their ignorance.

[It is weak also] because they were not of that opinion, and [because] Satan does not whisper that to any Son of Adam. Instead, all of them know [237] that they were created from their fathers and their mothers.

[It is weak also] because their recognition of this neither necessitates their belief nor hinders their disbelief. The question is a [rhetorical] interrogative of negation whose intention is to make them confess that they were not created without anything. If they confess that a creator created them, that profits them. If they confess that they were created from matter, that does not make them one bit less dependent on God.

[Aspect 15: God’s acting from eternity is of His perfection, as is the eternity of the species of created things. Positing a beginning to God’s activity is irrational, and failing to distinguish concretized acts from the species of acts goes against tradition and reason. The errors of the philosophers and Kalām theologians are known by their views on movement and origination: the first err by positing the eternal movement of the celestial sphere, the second by positing a beginning to the genus of origination. The Kalām theologians erroneously think that their view is that of God’s Messengers]

The fifteenth aspect is that confessing that God has been doing what He wills and speaking what He wills from eternity is ascribing [to Him] the perfection that befits Him, whereas anything else is deficiency that must be denied of Him. The fact of His not having been powerful and then becoming powerful to speak or act, although it is ascribing [something] to Him, requires that He was deficient in the attribute of power, which is one of the necessary concomitants of His essence and which is one of the most obvious attributes of perfection. It is therefore impossible in reason, by certain demonstration. Indeed, if He had not been powerful and then became powerful, something (*amr*) must inevitably have made Him powerful after He was not. Now, as there was nothing there except pure nonexistence, it was impossible that He would become powerful after He was not. Likewise, it was impossible that He would become knowing after He was not [knowing] before that. [This is] opposite the human: he is not knowing and not powerful

and then someone else makes him knowing and powerful. And likewise when they said that He was not speaking and then became speaking.

This is one of the things that Imām Aḥmad [b. Ḥanbal] alleged against the Jahmīs: when they made Him not having been speaking, and then becoming speaking, they said [that this was] like the human. [Aḥmad] said, ‘You have combined assimilation (*tashbih*) [of God to creatures] with disbelief.’ I have narrated his words in another place.⁹⁹

[238] If someone says that He was in pre-eternity powerful to create what would be (*fīmā lā yazāl*), [1] this talk is contradictory because, according to [the Kalām theologians], it was not possible for Him to act in pre-eternity. Now, it is impossible that one for whom it was not possible to act in pre-eternity should be powerful in pre-eternity. For the synthesis of His being powerful with the object of power being impossible is a synthesis of two contraries. In the situation of the impossibility of acting, He was not powerful.

[2] Also, the act would turn from being impossible to being possible without a necessitating cause determining (*yuhaddid*) that and [by means of] an impossible non-existent.

[3] Besides, there is no situation that reason can posit without acting being possible in it and Him being powerful. Now, when one posits before that something which God wills, such is the matter. Thus, He has been powerful from eternity and the act possible. His power and His ability¹⁰⁰ to act have therefore no beginning. He has been powerful from eternity, acting being possible for Him, and so acting was never impossible for Him.

[4] Also, they claim that it is impossible in pre-eternity. [Now] pre-eternity is not something defined that reason can grasp. Rather, there is no extremity, to which positing an act eventually reaches, that would not be such that pre-eternity would be before it, without a definite extremity. Even if one posited the existence of cities many times [the number of] the cities of the earth, each city with as much mustard seed as to fill it, and [then] supposed that with each passing of a million years one grain of mustard seed disappeared, all the mustard seed would disappear and pre-eternity would not [yet] have ended. And if one supposed many, many times that, it would [still] not have ended.

⁹⁹ Although Ibn Taymiyya does not give his reference, he may be thinking of *Dar'* 2. 296, where he quotes Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's *al-Radd 'alā al-zanādiqa wa-l-Jahmiyya* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-salafiyya, 1393/1973–4), 36, in a slightly different form, ‘You have combined disbelief with assimilation’. For an English trans. of Ibn Ḥanbal's treatise, see Morris S. Seale, *Muslim Theology: A Study of Origins with Reference to the Church Fathers* (London: Luzac, 1964), 96–125 (quote on p. 116).

¹⁰⁰ *tamakkunīhi* F: *tamkīnīhi* M

There is no time that might be posited that is not such that pre-eternity was before [239] it. There is also no time in which the act emanates that is not such that it was possible before that. Now, if it was possible, what is there to make it necessary to define the situation of acting by the creation, and not by what was before that, in what is infinite?

[5] Moreover, the meaning of pre-eternity (*azal*) is the lack of beginning (*awwaliyya*). Pre-eternity is not something delimited. So, our saying, ‘He has been creating from eternity’, is equivalent to saying, ‘He is powerful perpetually (*dā’iman*)’, and His being powerful is a perpetual ascription having no start. Likewise, when it is said. ‘He has been speaking from eternity when He wills’ and ‘He has been doing what He wills from eternity’, [this] requires the perpetuity of His being speaking and acting by His will and His power. If someone is of the opinion that this requires the eternity of something with Him, that is due to his corrupt conception. Indeed, as He is Creator of everything, everything other than Him is created and preceded by nonexistence. So, with Him there is nothing eternal by virtue of His eternity. When it is said that He has been creating from eternity, its meaning is that He has been creating one created thing after another from eternity just as He will be creating one created thing after another in post-eternity. That which we deny [i.e. eternity], we deny of originating events and movements, one after another. There is nothing in this except an ascription to Him of perpetuity of acting, not [an ascription] of one among the things [He has] done being with Him [eternally] in its concrete entity.

If it is supposed that the species [of things done] has been with Him from eternity, neither revelation nor reason denies this ‘withness’ (*ma’iyya*). On the contrary, it is part of His perfection. He—Exalted is He—said, ‘Is He who creates like one who does not create? Will you not then remember?’ (Q. 16. 17). Creatures are always with Him, and there is nothing in their always being with Him in the future (*mustaqbal*) that contradicts His perfection. The thing that is obviously eternal in the future—although it originated in the past after it was not, as everything is created—has a start.¹⁰¹ However, we do not affirm categorically that it will have an end.

[240] This is a difference concerning the concrete entities of created things, and it is an authentic difference. The species, however, gets confused for many people with the concrete entity, just as this has become confused for many people concerning [God’s] speech. They therefore do not differentiate between His speech being eternal in the sense

¹⁰¹ The trans. of this sentence is uncertain, as the Arabic is obscure and possibly corrupt.

that He has been speaking from eternity when He wills and the concretized speech being eternal. Similarly, they did not differentiate between the concretized act being eternal and the species of the concretized act¹⁰² being eternal, as with the [celestial] sphere, which is originated, created, and preceded by nonexistence. And, likewise for all that is other than Him. This is what the Book, the Sunna, and the traditions have indicated. And this is what the clear intelligibles, purified from obscurities, indicate. We have elaborated discussion of this in another place, and we have explained the congruity of clear reason with authentic tradition and that¹⁰³ the error of the experts in philosophy and Kalām theology and others¹⁰⁴ concerns both or one of them.¹⁰⁵ True views known by reason or tradition, however, confirm one another as true and do not judge one another as lying.

He—Exalted is He—said, ‘One who comes with the truth, and [those who] confirm it as true, these are the pious’ (Q. 39. 33), after His statement, ‘Who is more unjust than him who fabricates a lie against God or considers as a lie the truth when it comes to him’ (Q. 29. 68, cf. 39. 32).¹⁰⁶ He commended only him who comes with the truth and accepts that the truth that came to him is true. [The former] is the situation of him who does not accept [anything] but the truth, does not reject that which another brings him of the truth, but rather accepts it, does not make one oppose the other, and does not refute one of them by the other. [241] [The latter is] the situation of him who lies against God and by tradition or reason relates to Him what it is not correct to relate to Him or considers as a lie the truth when it comes to him, and therefore calls a liar him who comes with a truth known from [tradition by] hearing (*sam'*) or reason. About the People of the Fire, He—Exalted is He—said, ‘And if we had been listening (*nasma'*) or reasoning (*na'qil*), we would not have been among the dwellers of the Fire’ (Q. 67. 10). He informed that if they had attained hearing or reason, they would not have entered the Fire. He—Exalted is He—also said, ‘Have they not travelled through the land so that they have hearts with which to reason or ears with which to hear? Truly, the eyes do not go blind, but the hearts that are in the breasts go blind’

¹⁰² *[qadīman wa-bayna kawn naw' al-fi'l]* F: — M: *[qadīman wa-l-shay']* R

¹⁰³ — F: *min* M

¹⁰⁴ — F: *fa-innamā huwa li-ghalat* M

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Taymiyya is likely referring to *Dar*.

¹⁰⁶ The text is that of Q. 29. 68. From the context, however, it is possible that Ibn Taymiyya meant to refer to Q. 39. 32 which is very similar, ‘Who is more unjust than he who lies against God and considers as a lie the truth when it comes to him’.

(Q. 22. 46).¹⁰⁷ And, He—Exalted is He—said, ‘We will show them our signs on the horizons and in their selves until it is clear to them that it is the truth’ (Q. 41. 53), that is, that the Qur’ān is true. He thus informed that he would show His servants visible signs created [by Him] until it became clear that the signs that are recited and heard are true.

Among the things by which the source of the error of these two groups is known is their error concerning movement, origination, and what is so called. One group [i.e. the philosophers], like Aristotle and his followers, said that it is not reasonable that the genus of movement, time, and originating events originated, that the Principle (*mabda'*) of every movement and originating event become an agent for these after it was not [one], and that time originated after it had not originated since a ‘before’ and an ‘after’ are only in a time. Now, all these propositions are only deemed true universally and are not deemed true when concretized. Moreover, they were of the opinion that the concretized movement, that is, the movement of the [celestial] sphere, is [242] the eternal and pre-eternal one and that its time is eternal. They clearly went astray and were in opposition to authentic tradition abundantly transmitted from the Prophets—God bless them and give them peace—in addition to their opposition to the clear reason to which the great majority of reasonable people—ancient and more recent—adhere.

A [second] group [i.e. the Kalām theologians] were of the opinion that the genus of movement, originating events, and acting could only be after none of these were, or, that the Agent of everything must have been stripped [of His attributes] from eternity, and that, then, originating events originated without a cause fundamentally, acting was turned from impossibility to possibility without a cause, He became powerful after He had not been without a cause, and the thing was after it had not been, in no time. And the like of that, which opposes clear reason. And despite this, they are of the opinion that this is the view of the religious communities from among the Muslims, the Jews, and the Christians. [However], this view is transmitted neither from Moses, nor Jesus, nor Muḥammad—God’s blessings upon them and His peace—nor from any of their followers. This is only one of the things that some people of innovation brought forth, but it spread among the ignorant [mixed] with the reality of the views of the Messengers and their followers. They were therefore of the opinion that this was the view of the Messengers—God bless them and give

¹⁰⁷ Q. 22. 46 begins *a-fa-lam yasīrū*... However, Ibn Taymiyya’s quotation of it here begins like the similar verse Q. 40. 21, *a-wa-lam yasīrū*...

them peace. However, relating this view to the Messengers and their followers led to the necessity of defaming them, either out of lack of knowledge of the truth of these sublime issues or out of a lack of explication of the truth. And, for them, both of these [reasons] compel them to exclude the Book, the Sunna, and the traditions of the *salaf* from being [divinely] guided. [243] They went astray only because of their lack of knowledge of that which the Messenger—God bless him and give him peace—his Companions—God be pleased with them—and their Followers in beneficence, knew. For God—Exalted is He—‘sent His Messenger’—God bless him and give him peace—‘with guidance and the religion of the truth in order to manifest it over all religion. God is sufficient as a witness’ (Q. 48. 28).

